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Introduction

Introduction

The purpose of the NeHBS is to help local preservation advocates, elected officials, land-use planners, economic development coordinators, and tourism promoters understand the wealth of historic properties in their community. Properties included in the survey have no use restrictions placed on them, nor does the survey require any level of maintenance or accessibility by property owners. Rather, the survey provides a foundation for identifying properties that may be worthy of preservation, promotion, and recognition within a community.

The NeHBS provides a basis for preservation and planning at all levels of government and for individual groups or citizens. Generally, the NeHBS includes properties that convey a sense of architectural significance. When possible and known, NeHBS also describes properties that have historical significance. Although every effort is made to be accurate and thorough, omissions may occasionally occur. Additionally, as the NeHBS is, in part, federally funded, the NeSHPO must use federal guidelines when evaluating and identifying historic properties. In short, the NeHBS is not an end in itself, but a beginning for public planners and individuals who value their community's history.

For more information, please call the NeHBS Program Associate or the NeHBS Coordinator.

National Register of Historic Places

One of the goals of the NeHBS is to help identify properties that may be eligible for listing on the NRHP. The NRHP Register is our nation's official list of significant historic properties. Created by the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*, the NRHP includes buildings, structures, districts, objects, and sites that are significant in our history or prehistory. These properties may reflect an historically significant pattern, event, person, architectural style, or archeological site. NRHP properties may be significant at the local, state, or national levels.

Properties need not be as "historic" as Mt. Vernon or architecturally spectacular as the Nebraska State Capitol to be listed on the NRHP. Local properties that retain their physical integrity and convey local historic significance may also be listed.

It is important to note what listing a property on the NRHP means or, perhaps more importantly, what it does not mean. The NRHP does **not**:

- Restrict, in any way, a private property owner's ability to alter, manage, or dispose of a property.
- Require that properties be maintained, repaired, or restored.
- Invoke special zoning or local landmark designation.
- Allow the listing of individual private property over an owner's objection.
- Allow the listing of historic districts over a majority of property owners' objection.
- Require public access to private property.

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Throughout most of Nebraska's history, historic preservation was the province of dedicated individuals and organizations working alone in their local communities. Since the passage of the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*, however, the Governor of each state has been required to appoint a State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to oversee preservation efforts mandated by the 1966 act. In Nebraska, the Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) serves as SHPO. The staff of the NSHS' Historic Preservation Division forms the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office (NeSHPO).

The NeSHPO administers a wide range of preservation programs. The duties of the NeSHPO relating to programs called for by the *National Historic Preservation Act* include:

- Conducting and maintaining a statewide historic building survey.
- Administering the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) program.
- Assisting local governments in the development of local historic preservation programs and certification of qualifying governments.
- Administering a federal tax incentives program for the preservation of historic buildings.
- Assisting federal agencies in their responsibility to identify and protect historic properties that may be affected by their projects.
- Providing preservation education, training, and technical assistance to individuals and groups and local, state, and federal agencies.

What follows is a brief description of NeSHPO programs, followed by a staff guide with telephone numbers. Though described separately, it is important to remember that NeSHPO programs often act in concert, and should be considered elements of the NeSHPO mission and a part of the mission of the NSHS.

Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey

The Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey (NeHBS) was begun in 1974. The survey is conducted on a county-by-county basis and currently includes over 60,000 properties that reflect the rich architectural and historic heritage of Nebraska. The survey is conducted by researchers who drive every rural and urban public road in a county and record each property that meets certain historic requirements. Surveyors never enter private property without permission. In addition to this fieldwork, surveyors research the history of the area in order to better understand their subject. The NeHBS often includes thematic subjects that may be unique to a certain county, such as an historic highway or type of industry.

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Listing a property on the NRHP does:

- Provide prestigious recognition to significant properties.
- Encourage the preservation of historic properties.
- Provide information about historic properties for local and statewide planning purposes.
- Help promote community development, tourism, and economic development.
- Provide basic eligibility for financial incentives, when available.

For more information, please call the NRHP coordinator.

Certified Local Governments

An important goal of the NeSHPO is to translate the federal preservation program, as embodied by the *National Historic Preservation Act*, to the local level. An important element of this goal is to help link local governments with a nationwide network of federal, state, and local organizations. One of the most effective tools for this purpose is the Certified Local Government (CLG) program. A CLG is a local government, either a county or municipality, that has adopted preservation as a priority. To become a CLG a local government must:

Create a preservation commission to oversee the preservation ordinance and the CLG program;

- Establish a preservation ordinance that includes protection for historic properties at a level the community decides is appropriate.
- Promote preservation education and outreach.
- Conduct and maintain some level of historic building survey.
- Establish a mechanism to designate local landmarks.

There are a number of advantages to achieving CLG status:

- A CLG is eligible to receive matching funds from the NeSHPO that are unavailable to non-CLGs.
- Contributing buildings within local landmark districts may be eligible for preservation tax incentives (see below), without being listed on the NRHP.
- CLGs have an additional tool when considering planning, zoning, and land use issues through their landmarking and survey programs.
- CLGs have the ability to monitor and preserve structures that reflect the community's heritage.

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- CLGs have access to a nationwide information network of local, state, federal, and private preservation institutions.
- Finally, but not least, a CLG through its ordinance and commission, has a built-in mechanism to promote pride in and understanding of a community's history.

Certification of a local government for CLG status comes from the NeSHPO and the National Park Service, and there are general rules to follow. A community considering CLG status, however, is given broad flexibility within those rules when structuring their CLG program. The emphasis of the CLG program is local management of historic properties with technical and economic assistance from the NeSHPO.

For more information, please call the CLG coordinator.

Preservation Tax Incentives

Since 1976, the Internal Revenue Code has contained provisions offering tax credits for the certified rehabilitation of income-producing historic properties. Historic properties are defined as those listed on the NRHP, or as buildings that contribute to the significance of an NRHP or locally landmarked (by a CLG see above) historic district. An income-producing property may be a rental residential, office, commercial, or industrial property.

A certified rehabilitation is generally one that conforms to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. The standards are a common sense approach to the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. It is important to remember that this program promotes the rehabilitation of historic properties so that they may be used to the benefit and enjoyment of a community into the 21st century. The program is not necessarily intended to reconstruct or restore historic buildings to exact, as-built specifications.

The tax incentive program in Nebraska has been responsible for:

- The reinvestment of millions of dollars for the preservation of historic buildings.
- The establishment of thousands of low and moderate income housing units and upper-end units.
- The adaptive reuse of previously under or unutilized historic properties in older downtown commercial areas.
- Helping to broaden the tax base.
- Giving developers and city planners a tool to consider projects in older, historic neighborhoods.

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Certification of the historic character of the income-producing property (usually by listing the property on the NRHP) and certification of the historic rehabilitation are made by both the NeSHPO and the National Park Service. We strongly urge contacting the NeSHPO and a professional tax advisor, legal counsel, or appropriate local Internal Revenue Service office before initiating any activity for a project that anticipates the use of preservation tax incentives.

For more information, please call the Review and Preservation Services Program Associate.

Federal Project Review

Section 106 of the *National Historic Preservation Act* requires that federal agencies take into account the effect of their undertakings on historic properties; seek ways to avoid or reduce adverse effects their projects may have on historic properties; and afford the Federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation an opportunity to comment on the project and its effects on historic properties. The regulations that govern the *Section 106* process as it is known, also require that the federal agency consult with the NeSHPO to identify historic properties in the project area; assess the effects a project may have on historic properties located in the project area; and seek ways to avoid or reduce adverse effects the project may have on historic properties.

For example, if the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), through the Nebraska Department of Roads, contemplates construction of a new highway, they must contact the NeSHPO for assistance in determining whether any sites or structures listed on, or eligible for listing on, the NRHP are located in the project area. If properties that meet this criteria are found, the FHWA must consult with the NeSHPO to avoid or reduce any harm the highway might cause the property. Note that a property need not actually be listed on the NRHP, only eligible. This process is to take place early enough in the planning process to allow for alternatives that would avoid adverse effects to historic properties; i.e., in the example above, the modification of a new highway's right-of-way could avoid an archeological site or historic barn.

It is important to note that public participation in this process is vital. The 106 process requires the federal agency to seek views of the public and interested parties if adverse effects to historic properties are discovered through consultation with the NeSHPO. The NeSHPO examines information provided by the federal agency, the NeHBS, and the NRHP, but often the most valuable information comes from comments provided by the public. Section 106 was included in the *National Historic Preservation Act* to protect locally significant historic properties from unwitting federal action. It is truly a law that gives the public a voice in an often unsympathetic bureaucratic system.

For more information about Section 106 review, please call the NeSHPO.

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Public Outreach and Education

The primary function of the NeSHPO is to assist communities in preserving significant buildings, sites, and structures that convey a sense of community history. The most powerful tool available to the NeSHPO in this regard is public education. For this reason, NeSHPO staff spend considerable time conducting public meetings and workshops and disseminating information to the public.

Our goal is to assist local individuals, groups, and governments understand, promote, and preserve historic properties. The NeSHPO advocates not only the self-evident aesthetic advantages of historic preservation, but also the potential for preservation to help promote economic development, community planning, tourism, environmental sensitivity, and land-use planning.

The above short descriptions are meant to orient the reader to the NeSHPO programs within the larger mission of the NSHS. As all NeSHPO programs originate from a common source, the *National Historic Preservation Act*, they work best when they work together, either in whole or in part. For the programs to function at all, they require the interest and participation of the people they are meant to serve . . . the public.

For more information about the NeSHPO or the programs described above, please call (402) 471-4787 or 1-800-833-6747.

Organization

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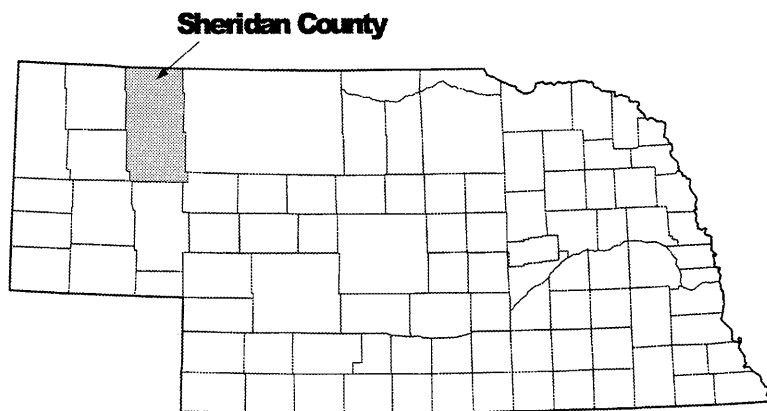
Archaeology

Terry Steinacher, Archeology Program Associate

Telephone: (308) 665-2918

All of the personnel above, excluding Mr. Steinacher, may also be reached by dialing 1-800-833-6747.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

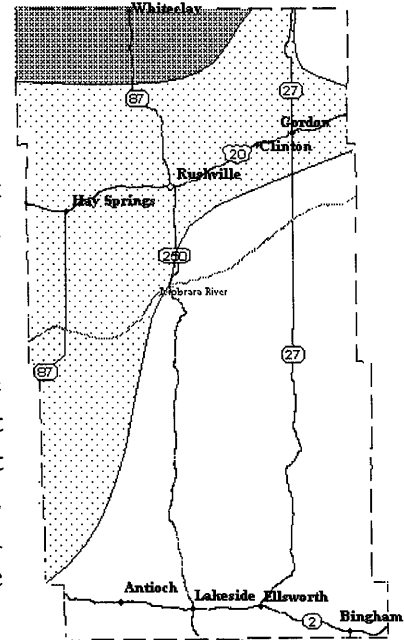


Historic Overview of Sheridan County

The Landscape and Environment

Sheridan County, located in the Nebraska Panhandle, comprises 2,466 square miles, stretching 70 miles south from the South Dakota border into Nebraska's Sand Hills. Native Americans were the only residents of Sheridan County for 1,000 years until the nineteenth century, when ranchers and homesteaders arrived. Settlement of the county dramatically changed the landscape of the area. In June 1885, the county's population was 2,948, but by 1890 had swelled to 8,687.¹ Western Nebraska, including Sheridan County, was attractive to settlers by the mid-1880s, because little unclaimed territory was available in central and northern Nebraska.

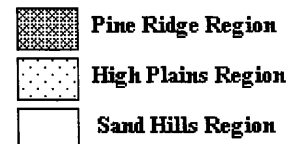
Sheridan County's landscape, environment, and economic livelihood can be loosely divided into two sections by the Niobrara River, which travels west to east. The Plains and Pine Ridge Regions of the north and west contrast with the Sand Hills of the south and east. North of the Niobrara River, farming is the economic livelihood, while the southern area profits from ranching. Density of past and present development in the Plains and Pine Ridge areas also contrasts with the smaller population in the Sand Hills.



The Plains and Pine Ridge Regions

(Northern and Western Sheridan County)

The topography of the northern and western sections of Sheridan County includes two geographic regions, the Plains and the Pine Ridge, which contrast with the Sand Hills of the county's southern and eastern sections. The Plains is a large section of the county north of the Niobrara River, and the Pine Ridge is a small area in the northernmost part of the county. Due to the fertile soil in northern Sheridan County, the land was more desirable for farming activities than the grazing hills to the south. Therefore, this area attracted more settlers than did the Sand Hills, which was sparsely populated by ranchers and cattlemen.



A characteristic landscape feature of the Pine Ridge Region is the coniferous tree-covered hills dotting the landscape. The Pine Ridge's evergreen-wooded hills extend from Sheridan County into Dawes and Sioux Counties to the west. This northern part of Sheridan County is covered with short grasses and provides good soil for crops that is not easily eroded.²

¹ Marshall Everett Bowen, "Changes in Resource Evaluation as Keys to Selected Aspects of Geographic Change: The Case of Sheridan County, Nebraska, 1875-1925" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1970), 285-286.

² Winfield Delle, "The Role of Barbed Wire in the Cattleman Versus Rancher-farmer Conflict of Sheridan County" (master's thesis, Chadron, Nebr.: Chadron State College, 1968), 8-9.

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The Plains Region of Nebraska includes 12,000 square miles west and northwest of the Sand Hills and encompasses the northwestern portion of Sheridan County. The region is defined by level plateaus with occasional deep canyons. Regional writer Mari Sandoz described the Plains Region as her father, Jules Sandoz, approached his first homestead site along the Niobrara River in Mirage Flats:



The landscape of Sheridan County's Plains Region

. . . the hills gave way and before him was the silver ribbon of the Niobrara, the wooded slopes barely tinged with palest green, topped by yellowish sandstone bluffs. Farther on was a plain, flatter than the palm of a man's hand, and reaching into the dim blue hazes each way. Far off to the left was a flat butte, box-like. To the extreme right were low hills, similar to those left behind.³

Historically, the Plains had few trees, with most found along the Niobrara River. Today, a dominant topographical feature are the man-made shelterbelts installed to provide wind and erosion protection.⁴ Construction of the shelterbelts began in the 1930s through the encouragement of federal programs, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Soil Erosion Service, and later the Soil Conservation Service, to prevent soil erosion.⁵

An area commonly referred to as Mirage Flats lies within the Plains Region in western Sheridan County. The area obtained its name from the mirages that appear with the morning heat on the level, elevated areas in front of the hills. Many early nineteenth century settlers of the Mirage Flats were driven off by cattlemen, grasshopper invasions, crop failure, and economic depression. Despite these incentives to farm elsewhere, residents of Mirage Flats made two separate attempts to improve the land with irrigation: the first in the 1890s and the second nearly 50 years later.

The Sand Hills Region (Southern and Eastern Sheridan County)

To some of the settlers the sandhills seemed a soft, undemanding country, ideal for loafing. But only until the ranches extended no more credit on pancake flour, an invasion of sand fleas came, or the winds of winter swept upon them out of the Dakotas. To others the country was aloof, austere, forbidding; the wind sucking their courage as it sucked the green from the grass by mid-June. Some saw it as a great sea caught and held forever in a spell, and were afraid. And here and there were a few sensitive to the constantly changing tans and mauves of the strange, rhythmical

³ Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1935), 19.

⁴ Rows of trees, including both deciduous and coniferous varieties.

⁵ A further discussion of shelterbelts is included in *Agricultural and Ranching Practices in Sheridan County*, included in *Historic Overview of Sheridan County*.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

hills that crowded away into the hazy horizon. They heard the undying wind rattle the seed pods of the yuccas against the sky, sing its thin flute song over the tall sparse grasses of the slopes.

– From *Old Jules* by Sheridan County native Mari Sandoz⁶



The Sand Hills

The Sand Hills is a silent but visually arresting landscape. The wide expanse of rolling hills range from 25 to 100 feet high and run roughly west to east. Flat valleys between the sets of hills features grasses suitable for grazing or hay crops. Several small lakes are found among the hills, including some with a high alkali content. In the flats the water table is very high, and a windmill can easily bring water to the surface. Few trees are found across the rolling landscape and often indicate the location of a ranch or former homestead.

Early surveyors described the Sand Hills as “bunch grass and soap weed, well clothed with grama, buffalo, and other grasses, and no timber.”⁷ The soil in the Sand Hill region is a fine loess – a sandy material that is easily eroded if its grass cover is removed. Residents remember the days in the not so distant past when the hills were sand with very little grass cover.

In 1883, no more than 300 people occupied the Sand Hills of Sheridan County.⁸ Today, viewsheds extend for miles atop the hills with little man-made or cultural intrusions besides cattle, windmills, cattle fences, or the occasional ranch. For a large part, the Sand Hills may appear much as they did to the early ranchers rounding up cattle and as Jules Sandoz first saw them on his way to establish a homestead. The region is described in *Old Jules*:

And sometimes for ten, twenty miles through the choppy country along the south road there was no house, not even a horsebacker—only the endless monotony of a stormy sea, caught and held forever in sand.⁹

History of Western Nebraska

Westward movement along the Mormon and Oregon trails, which followed the Platte River to the western United States, greatly affected Nebraska Territory during the mid-1800s. Thousands of travelers ventured through the territory during this period, and many

Jules Sandoz was drawn to the Sand Hills and settled his Kinkaid homestead in this region. *The truth was he [Jules Sandoz] had no desire to leave the Running Water, but the sandhills drew him as they had the day on the top of Deer Hill with the Sioux, as they had that first time on the Snake.*

Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 307.

⁶ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 354.

⁷ Charles Barron McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sand Hills* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 100.

⁸ Bowen, 285.

⁹ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 421.

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landmarks of the pioneers' journey are found throughout western Nebraska, including Chimney Rock, Jailhouse Rock, and Scotts Bluff.

In the 1830s, the pioneers first used the overland trails, which helped settle Nebraska Territory. Twenty years later, the *1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act* officially opened the territory for settlement, and towns quickly developed in the east along the Missouri River. In 1867, Nebraska entered the Union as the 37th state, although settlement of western Nebraska did not begin until the 1870s and 1880s.¹⁰

Settlement followed railroad construction west across the state, making western Nebraska – including the Panhandle – the last area of the state to be settled. The Panhandle borders Colorado, Wyoming, and South Dakota, covering almost 14,000 square miles of land.

The Panhandle is the least populated area of the state encompassing Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux Counties. Initially, Lyons County covered the entire area, but by 1875, the southern half of the Panhandle was organized into Cheyenne County.¹¹ Beginning in the 1880s, the northern Panhandle counties of Box Butte, Dawes, Sheridan, and Sioux were organized.¹² In 1888, Cheyenne County was divided to form Banner, Deuel, Kimball, Scotts Bluff and, in 1909, the last two counties were organized – Garden from a portion of Deuel, and Morrill from Cheyenne.

Initially avoided because of the desolate appearance, the Panhandle's Sand Hills became one of the largest cattle-ranching regions of the state and beef production one of its largest industries.¹³ The earliest white settlers to the Panhandle's Sand Hills region were Texas cattle ranchers who drove their cattle north for sale in eastern markets because of the poor post-Civil War economy of the South.¹⁴ Cattlemen allowed their cattle to graze on western Nebraska grassland before moving them to markets such as Nebraska City on the Missouri River. Later, as settlement of eastern Nebraska increased, ranchers followed the railroads of the Union Pacific (UP), the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley (FE&MV), and the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (CB&Q) into the Native American-held lands

¹⁰ James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 156.

¹¹ A.B. Wood, *Pioneer Tales of the North Platte Valley and the Nebraska Panhandle* (Gering, Nebr.: Courier Press, 1938), 165.

¹² Jane Graff, ed., *Nebraska: Our Towns...The Panhandle* (Seward, Nebr.: Second Century Publications, 1988), 13.

¹³ Dorothy Weyer Creigh, *Nebraska: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 146-147.

¹⁴ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 76.

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of western Nebraska. Ogallala, located just east of the Panhandle, developed as a cattle station on the UP line and enabled ranchers to settle in the Sand Hills while possessing a major shipping point only a short distance away.



Historic view of the Modisett Ranch - early twentieth century (SCHS)

Between 1877 and 1879, the federal government sent the Sioux Indians, who had been given the area in the Panhandle for hunting grounds, to the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota. The relocation allowed additional ranchers to move into the unclaimed territory and use the government land for open range. The Sand Hills, because of the high nutritional value of the grass, provided the best grazing land for cattle and became the prime area for cattle ranching in the state by 1880.¹⁵

As cattlemen established large ranches in the Sand Hills, the government surveyed and sectioned the area for homestead claims.¹⁶ Even though land surveys in the Panhandle were not conducted until the mid-1870s, “squatters” had entered the area much earlier and filed their claims once the land was legally opened for settlement.

The three railroad companies that had entered the Panhandle in the late 1800s – the UP, the FE&MV, and the CB&Q – influenced homesteading in the area. In the southern Panhandle, several communities developed along the route of the UP’s transcontinental line along the Platte River into Wyoming beginning in 1866. However, the FE&MV played a greater role in settlement, reaching Chadron by 1885 and bringing settlers to the farmlands of the northern Panhandle. By 1888, the CB&Q Railroad extended its line to Alliance.¹⁷ Initially developed to profit from the 1870s Black Hills Gold Rush, the FE&MV later shipped farm crops while the CB&Q shipped cattle.¹⁸

At the turn of the century, the Panhandle was still vastly unsettled, prompting Congressman Moses Kinkaid of Nebraska to propose a bill allowing homesteaders in 37 northwest Nebraska counties to file claims on 640 acres of nonirrigable land.¹⁹ After living on the land for five years and improving its value by \$1.25 an acre, a homesteader would receive a patent.²⁰ The *Kinkaid Act* was passed in

¹⁵ Creigh, 136; and Olson and Naugle, 192.

¹⁶ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 101.

¹⁷ Wood, 157, and 268. The Chicago & North Western Railroad purchased the FE&MV Railroad in 1903.

¹⁸ Wood, 267; and Olson and Naugle, 192.

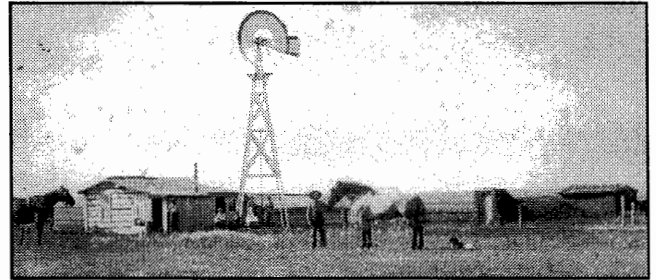
¹⁹ Creigh, 143. Land had to be considered unsuitable for farmland to be a Kinkaid claim.

²⁰ Olson and Naugle, 197. The homesteader first had to file a claim and after five years of settlement he could apply for a patent to his property.

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1904; settlers who subsequently filed claims became known as “Kinkaiders.” Homesteaders who had filed previously under the *Homestead Act* could add 480 acres to their holdings and enjoyed the first rights to available adjacent land.²¹

Many Kinkaiders settled in the Sand Hills from 1904 until the 1920s, although conflicts arose between the ranchers and farmers. Because the land on which they settled had been vacant for so long, some ranchers used it for open range. Several of the largest ranchers were accused of illegally fencing government land, intimidating settlers, and homesteading illegally. Some served jail sentences or paid fines.



Early homestead in Sheridan County - late nineteenth century (NSHS)

Because of the vast open spaces, electricity did not reach Sheridan County ranches until the 1940s, when Hilda Black, a local resident, convinced the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) to support line construction. On behalf of the Panhandle Rural Electric Membership Association (PREMA), Mrs. Black signed a mortgage for \$300,000 to construct power lines to the distant ranches, and PREMA completed construction in 1948.²² The demand for electricity was so great that PREMA paid off the mortgage to the REA after only 13 years of operation.

During the rest of the twentieth century, settlement of the Panhandle has been minimal. Some of the residents are ranchers, although the sugar beet industry and wheat farming have also played a role.²³ Only a few larger communities are located in the Panhandle region, the largest of which is Scottsbluff with a population of almost 14,000.²⁴

Native American Settlement and Retreat from Sheridan County

During the early years of white settlement, western Nebraska – particularly the Panhandle – was occupied by nomadic tribes of the Dakota Sioux.²⁵ The area that would later become Sheridan County was home to the Oglala and Brule Sioux tribes. As white settlers moved west across Nebraska, nomadic Native American tribes were forced from their lands into increasingly smaller

²¹ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 216.

²² Nellie Snyder Yost, *The Call of the Range: The Story of the Nebraska Stock Growers Association* (Denver, Colo.: Sage Books, 1966), 350-352.

²³ Creigh, 146.

²⁴ Graff, 83.

²⁵ Creigh, 18.

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areas. Tribes throughout western Nebraska and the western United States were angered by the number of white settlers traveling through their land on the overland trails to Oregon and California.

This friction was compounded by the number of hunters who moved into the area to kill the American bison for their hides. Buffalo, sacred to several nomadic Plains tribes, were used by the Native Americans for food, clothing, and tools. The buffalo hunters quickly depleted the buffalo supply, contributing to starvation among the tribes who relied on the annual buffalo hunt for food.²⁶

Conflicts between white settlers and Native Americans led to meetings between the federal government and the tribes. In the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie signed by the Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes, the tribes agreed to specific land boundaries in the Nebraska Panhandle and to remain peaceful.²⁷ However, the overland trails still crisscrossed their lands, causing many conflicts. Eventually, a conflict over a wandering cow in the camp of Brule Sioux on the North Platte, east of Fort Laramie resulted in the killing of the Sioux Chief, Conquering Bear, by Lieutenant John Gratton and his men, who were in turn killed by the Sioux.²⁸ The conflict brought on a series of "Indian Wars" beginning in the 1860s.²⁹

During the 1860s, the U.S. Government, preoccupied with the Civil War in the south, neglected its pursuit of the Native American tribes, who began a campaign to reclaim their lands. However, at the end of the Civil War, the army concentrated its efforts in the West and western Nebraska to protect the Boseman Trail to Montana and the construction of the transcontinental Union Pacific Railroad.³⁰

In 1868, a council of Native Americans once again met at Fort Laramie and signed a treaty that allowed white men to travel through Indian Territory without harassment. In return for their cooperation, the Native Americans received educational assistance, food rations, and all land lying north of the North Platte River and east of the Big Horn Mountains.³¹ A year later President Grant implemented the Peace Policy of 1869, which enforced a fixed reservation plan for western tribes and created a Board of Indian Commissioners.³² In 1871, the U.S. government moved the Brule Sioux

²⁶ Creigh, 130.

²⁷ Olson and Naugle, 122.

²⁸ Olson and Naugle, 122.

²⁹ Creigh, 75.

³⁰ Olson and Naugle, 126.

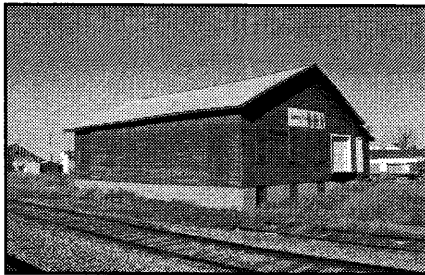
³¹ Wood, 231.

³² McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 237.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

from a reservation along Whetstone Creek in South Dakota to the White River in Wyoming. The government moved them again in 1874 to the Spotted Tail Agency in what is now northwest Sheridan County.³³

Shortly after the Brule Sioux moved to the Spotted Tail Agency, gold was discovered in the Black Hills – territory that had officially been given to the Sioux in the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. Gold seekers from the East ventured into forbidden Sioux lands, resulting in an uprising led by Crazy Horse at the Rosebud Reservation on June 17, 1876, and the Battle of Little Big Horn one week later, June 25, 1876.³⁴ Although the Sioux considered the two uprisings successes, many of their people were killed and the Sioux finally conceded to peace in the fall of 1876.³⁵ In 1877, the Oglala Sioux, under the leadership of Red Cloud, agreed to move to the Pine Ridge Reservation in southern South Dakota, and 10,000 Brule Sioux at the Spotted Tail Agency agreed to move to the area around the Pine Ridge.³⁶ The Brule moved to the Rosebud Reservation in 1879.³⁷



Pine Ridge Agency Warehouse in Rushville (SH08-033) - potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)

In 1890, one of the last major conflicts of the “Indian Wars” occurred when the Sioux from the Pine Ridge Reservation assembled for a Ghost Dance, a ritual to bring back the buffalo. Settlers fearful of this large gathering called in the army, who killed all men, women, and children as they began the ritual dance.³⁸

Although the Sioux Pine Ridge Reservation is in South Dakota, Sheridan County has been greatly influenced by its proximity, only one mile north of the Nebraska-South Dakota border. Historically, ranches throughout the county have supplied beef cattle to the reservation. Whiteclay, the northernmost Sheridan County community, was established because of its location near the reservation; the Pine Ridge Agency Warehouse, which stored all goods for Pine Ridge, was in Rushville.

³³ Wood, 231.

³⁴ Creigh, 77.

³⁵ McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 102.

³⁶ Wood, 232, 235, and McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 102.

³⁷ Wood, 235.

³⁸ Creigh, 78.

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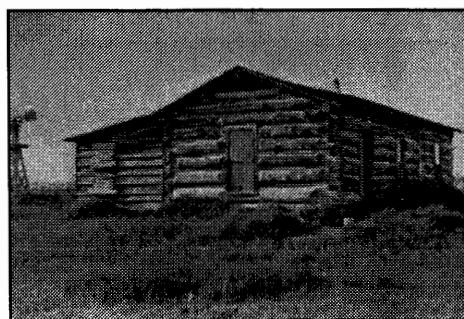
Claiming the Land

By 1880, the United States Land Survey Department had mapped the Sand Hills, except for a small area of northwest Cherry County. A new land office was opened at Valentine, east of Sheridan County, in 1883.³⁹ Several land acts in the mid-to-late nineteenth century facilitated settlement and the development of agricultural and ranching in Sheridan County.

Settlers homesteading in Sheridan County had the opportunity to use settlement acts to obtain land. In most cases, the first step toward claiming land was to file a land entry at the land office. Next, legal requirements needed to be fulfilled prior to the land transfer. With the variety of settlement acts, legal requirements could include stipulations of improvements to the property, an investment in time up to and in excess of eight years, and cash payments. Once the legal requirements were fulfilled, a land patent was issued and the homesteader became a property owner.⁴⁰ Two methods were commonly used by settlers to increase their land holdings: husbands and wives filed for land independently, doubling their amount, and settlers filed multiple claims using several of the settlement acts.

Early Settlement Acts

Under the *Preemption Act of 1841*, a settler was able to establish a home and then file a declaratory statement of intent to claim the land at the land office. Within 18 to 21 months, the settler paid a fee of \$1.25 per acre and was issued a land patent of ownership. Many homesteaders effectively used this act to claim land for their farms. However, the act was also used fraudulently to claim areas of mining lands, coniferous forests, or grazing lands.⁴¹



John W. Grubb log cabin built c. 1886 (SCHS)

The *Homestead Act of 1862* gave a homesteader 160 acres of land on the condition that he or she live on and improve the land for five years. The homesteaders' only expense was a \$10 filing fee, making this a very popular method of land acquisition.

In June 1872, the *1867 Soldiers' and Sailors' Homestead Act* was amended to allow eligible veterans, their widows, and children, to increase the size of their previous homesteads to 160 acres. The time the veteran served in the military was deducted from the five-year waiting period for claiming the title. The act allowed for an agent of the eligible party to file for the additional land. Therefore, many land agents and attorneys purchased "additional homestead certificates" from veterans and sold them to ranchers for a profit. The law also allowed eligible participants to file a declaratory statement on a

³⁹ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 121.

⁴⁰ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 112.

⁴¹ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 140.

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piece of land. The statement held the land until the actual claim was filed within the required six-month period.⁴²

The *Timber Culture Act of 1873* provided 40 to 160 acres of land to a homesteader eight years after he planted at least 40 acres of trees on his claim. By 1874, the acreage of planted trees was reduced to ten acres. The intent of tying tree planting to land distribution was to increase tree cover and provide both lumber and fuel. Because filers did not need to live on the tree claim, there was plenty of opportunity for abuse of this land act. *Homestead* and *Timber Culture* entries were often cheaper than the *Preemption Act* claims which required a payment of \$1.25 per acre.

All of these land distribution acts led to the settlement of a large portion of northern and western Sheridan County. According to General Land Office records, in the 1880s about 75 percent of land entries for Sheridan County were filed under the *Homestead Act*, about 15 percent were filed as *Preemption claims*, and no more than 10 percent were filed under the *Timber Culture Act*.⁴³

Later Legislation

Two new land acts were passed in 1897. The first act helped ranchers get access to water for cattle, and the second aided settlers who had forest land taken by the government for reserves. Both of these acts were used by ranchers to amass additional acreage for grazing purposes.

The *Reservoir Act* was passed to allow ranchers access to water for their cattle. Under the act, up to 160 acres of unoccupied land could be claimed if a reservoir was constructed within two years. The reservoir could not be fenced and could be used by anyone to water animals. The land was reserved from sale as long as the reservoir remained operable. This law was abused by some people who filed claims with no intention to build a reservoir. However, the claim benefitted ranchers by preventing settlement by others for awhile.⁴⁴

The *Forest Lieu Act* was passed to accommodate settlers who had filed on land turned into National Forest Reserves by the *1891 Forest Reserve Act*. However, the *Forest Lieu Act* was used by ranchers to amass title to additional land. Private owners of land within the newly designated forest reserves could select the same acreage of land in designated areas at no charge. Some of the land offered in exchange was located in Nebraska close to the Sand Hills.⁴⁵ Ranchers bought land rights and land from the reserve landowners to amass property in the Sand Hills.

⁴² McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 207.

⁴³ Bowen, 301.

⁴⁴ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 196.

⁴⁵ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 199.

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The *Kinkaid Act* of 1904 opened up ten million acres of land in 37 western Nebraska counties to homesteaders.⁴⁶

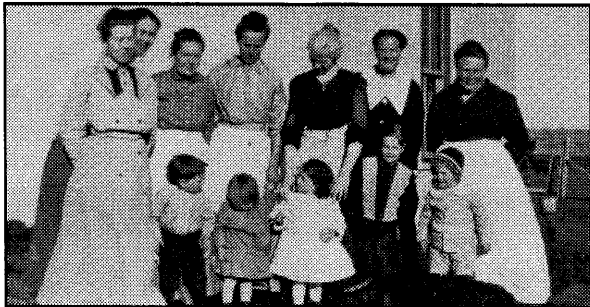
The *Kinkaid Act* offered settlers up to 640 acres for their homestead. The homesteader could receive a land patent if they could prove they had improved the land by \$1.25 per acre. The *Kinkaid Act* also allowed settlers who had filed 160-acre claims to increase their claims to 640 acres, with the stipulation that additional land must be attached to the original claim on two or more sides.⁴⁷

Two weeks before the opening, covered wagons, horsebackers, men afoot, toiled into Alliance, got information at the land office, and vanished eastward over the level prairie. Many turned back at the first soft yellow chop hills, pockmarked by blowouts and warted with soapweeds. Others kept on, through this protective border, into the broad valley region, with high hills reaching towards the whitish sky.

Mari Sandoz, Old Jules, 268.

Agricultural and Ranching Practices in Sheridan County

The landscape has determined the culture and settlement patterns in Sheridan County. Just as the landscape is diverse, so too are the settlement and agricultural activities that have taken place. In this section, we discuss settlement patterns, early homesteaders, and agricultural activities in the context of the county's two distinct geographic regions that offer diverse landscapes and agricultural practices – the Plains and Pine Ridge Region and the Sand Hills Region.



Early residents of Sheridan County - early twentieth century (LL)

The Plains and Pine Ridge Regions

Early Settlers

The two railroad lines established in Sheridan County in the 1880s increased settlement by making the area more accessible and at the same time promoted the area. Railroad companies, anxious to increase the shipping of goods and people on their lines, advertised in circulations in various languages and in many countries, including the United States, Canada, England, Scandinavia, Germany, France, and Bohemia. Often the advertising to attract

settlers was misleading. One such ad falsely stated that plowing in the Sand Hills would add moisture to the atmosphere and increase rainfall.⁴⁸

The availability of promising farmland prompted many to settle in northern Sheridan County. The settlers were often young and sometimes under the required age of 21 for land

The Spring of 1885 a new wave of settlers broke and spread over the hard-land table of the upper Niobrara. Almost every quarter section was scarred by spade and plough. Earth-walled homes went up or down, soddies or dugouts, or a combination of both.

Mari Sandoz, Old Jules, 59.

⁴⁶ Yost, 202.

⁴⁷ McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 216.

⁴⁸ Bowen, 303-307.

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filings.⁴⁹ Some early settlers were church-organized colonists from Indiana, Iowa, and northern Missouri, including Reverend Scamahorn, who formed the community of Gordon. Before 1892, most settlers were natives of eastern Nebraska or adjoining Midwestern states such as Iowa. However, a few settlers – including Swiss born Jules Sandoz – came from faraway lands including Germany, Bohemia, and Switzerland.⁵⁰

By 1890 Sheridan County's population was 8,687. About 7,000 of them lived north of the Niobrara River in the Plains and Pine Ridge Regions, which offered more fertile soil.⁵¹ Most of the early settlers had backgrounds in farming and brought with them some experience. However, many of them had not lived in a semi-arid, short-grass area before and faced some new challenges.⁵² Homesteaders often constructed a dugout or sod house for their first residence and hoped to upgrade their conditions as farming became profitable. Cash crops grown during this period included potatoes, corn, wheat, rye, and oats.⁵³

The early nineties [1890s] were so dry even the old-timers wondered if it would rain again in the panhandle.

Mari Sandoz, Old Jules, 148.

Droughts in the late 1880s through 1890s created difficult times for settlers, and many left Sheridan County in search of greener pastures. From 1890 to 1900, Sheridan County's population decreased by 30 percent to 6,033 residents.⁵⁴

Mirage Flats Irrigation: The First Attempt

In the 1880s the first settlers arrived in the Mirage Flats area, including the well-known homesteader, Jules Sandoz. Farming in the early 1880s was prosperous in the Mirage Flats area as a result of adequate rainfall. Between 1886 and 1890, below-average rainfall caused a regional drought. Some settlers chose to leave, while others looked for new water sources. In 1894, the first meetings to discuss irrigation took place, with the farmers forming a corporation to bring irrigation to their farms. Farmers sold \$100-shares of stock in the corporation to raise capital.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Mari Sandoz, Sandhills Sundays and Other Recollections, "The Homestead in Perspective" (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 7.

⁵⁰ Bowen, 286 and 292.

⁵¹ Delle, 28.

⁵² Bowen, 292.

⁵³ "Soddies to Satellites" (Rushville, Nebr.: Sheridan County Diamond Jubilee, Inc., 1960), 38.

⁵⁴ Population statistics were obtained from the Nebraska State Data Center, Center for Public Affairs Research, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

⁵⁵ Mark Clapp and Rolland Dewing, A Pioneer's Dream Come True: The Mirage Flats Irrigation Project (Chadron, Nebr.: B & B Printing, 1990), 2-4.

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The majority of cash crops came from the northern and western section of the county. Agricultural products exported from Sheridan County in the 1920s included potatoes and wheat.⁶⁰ As the farms in the Plains experienced success, the communities in the northern half of the county flourished to support the agricultural community. For example, grain elevators were constructed in each town along the northern railroad line to store crops before shipping.

In 1930 about 393,181 acres of Sheridan County were in use as cropland. The major crops included corn, wheat, oats, barley, and rye. Sheridan County retained its rural character, and in 1940 just over half of the population was located on farms or ranches.⁶¹ However, the irrigation of crops remained a concern, and a second attempt was launched to irrigate Mirage Flats.

Mirage Flats Irrigation: The Second Attempt

Telegram from Congressman Harry Coffee on April 30, 1940:

Carl Horn, Hay Springs, Nebraska-

John Page, chief of the Reclamation Bureau, advised me today that the Mirage Flats Project has received Presidential approval involving approximately two and one-half million dollars allocated from W.P.A funds. I expect operations to commence within sixty days. Congratulations.

Harry B. Coffee

In 1937, local residents organized the Mirage Flats Public Power and Irrigation District to convince the federal government to construct a dam across the Niobrara River with Works Progress Administration (WPA) funds. Residents hoped irrigation would allow diversified farming. In 1940, the Great Plains committee approved the group's proposal and the Mirage Flats became a project under the Water Conservation and Utilization Program set up by the *Wheeler-Case Act*, authorizing use of federal funds for irrigation development in the semiarid Plains.⁶² The Bureau of Reclamation developed the irrigation-water supply system and the Department of Agriculture purchased the land (about 12,000 acres), prepared it for irrigation, and resettled the land with drought-stricken farmers.⁶³ The WPA completed the labor and project construction.

War suspended project development in December 1942, but work resumed in the fall of 1944. Two years later, in 1946, the new canal was completed. Water flowed from the Niobrara, supplied by the 35,000-acre reservoir above Hemingford and held back by the Box Butte Dam.⁶⁴ The project

⁶⁰ Grant L. Shumway, ed., *History of Western Nebraska and Its People*, Vol. 1-3 (Lincoln, Nebr.: The Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1921), 436.

⁶¹ *Fifteenth and Sixteenth Census of the United States - Agriculture*.

⁶² John Bird, "Young Settlers on the Plains," in *Country Gentleman* (March 1949).

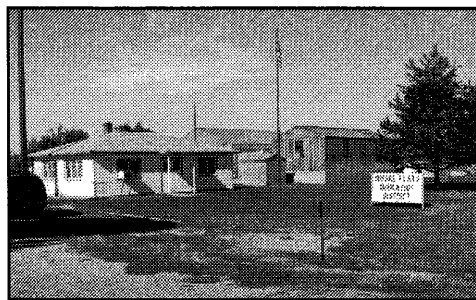
⁶³ Bird, 133.

⁶⁴ Bird, 133-134.

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cost about \$2.5 million.⁶⁵ Headquarters for the project were built by the Bureau of Reclamation and featured an office building, three residences, and maintenance garages (SH00-065).

Original project plans provided for each farm unit to include a house and outbuildings. After the construction of four units, it was found to be too expensive and the units were sold without building improvements.⁶⁶ Units were offered according to a strict plan: first, to those who had sold land for the project; next, to low-income families in the adjacent area; and third, to veterans approved by a selection committee. New owners were given a conditional five-year lease on the farm from the government with an option to purchase on a 40-year payment basis at \$70 an acre. During “dry farming” only 22 farms had been located in the area. Farms increased to 111 units in the 1950s with 11,662 irrigable acres.⁶⁷



*Mirage Flats Irrigation District Headquarters
(SH00-065) - potentially eligible for the NRHP*

The 1940s and 1950s were a period of stability for Mirage Flats, but as the number of families began to decline, remaining farmers consolidated land.⁶⁸ The Mirage Flats originally included farm units of 90 acres; however over the years, the units increased and the average size of a farm doubled by 1962.⁶⁹ In 1947, the crops grown on the project included 703 acres of corn, 380 acres of alfalfa, and 1,500 acres of sweet clover. In contrast, in 1987, the crops were 4,397 acres of corn, 1,000 acres of alfalfa hay, and 2,844 acres of dried beans.⁷⁰

Mid-twentieth Century Agriculture

Sheridan County's population remained fairly stable from 1920 to 1960, averaging between 9,000 and 9,800 residents. The number of farms within the Pine Ridge and Plains Regions decreased after the 1930s. The reduction of cash crops produced between 1930 and 1978 demonstrates the loss of agricultural production. During this period, the number of acres of corn planted decreased from 88,484 acres to 17,600 acres; bushels of wheat produced from 1,022,150 to only 61,597; bushels of

⁶⁵ Keith Carter, “Water, Lifeblood of Agriculture Will Come to Mirage Flats,” in The Nebraska Farmer (30 November 1940).

⁶⁶ Bird, 133.

⁶⁷ Clapp and Dewing, 29; and “Mirage Flats Irrigation Project Ups Production,” Lincoln Journal (2 October 1950).

⁶⁸ Clapp and Dewing, 34.

⁶⁹ “Hay Springs Got Sharp by Going Flat,” Lincoln Evening Journal and Nebraska State Journal (16 June 1962).

⁷⁰ Clapp and Dewing, 31-34.

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Conflicts between the ranchers and the farmers subsided over time, largely because many homesteaders found farming in the region difficult and did not stay. In 1934, the *Taylor Grazing Act* was passed. The act classified land by its highest and best use, allowing the Sand Hills to be classified as grazing land – the same principle the ranchers had advocated before passage of the *Kinkaid Act*. Since the land was classified by its best use, grazing privileges were allowed to cattlemen in grasslands and they did not need to own the land.⁹² Sheridan County's Sand Hills remain largely a ranching region of open land and cattle, much as it was in the heyday of the Spade Ranch and other successful large ranching operations.

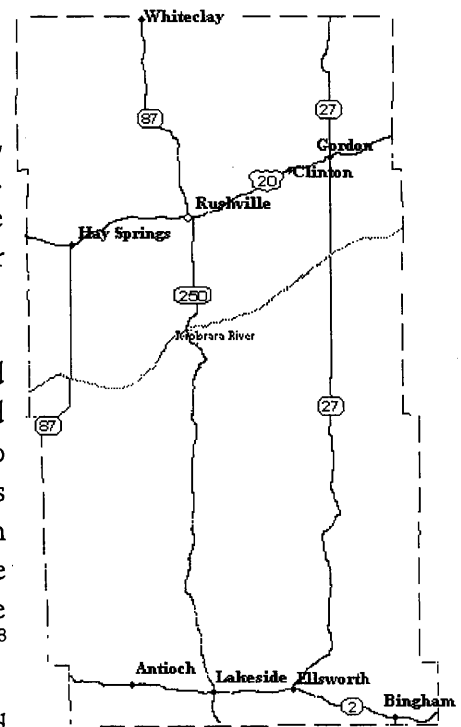
Communities of Sheridan County

Antioch

Located in southwestern Sheridan County along State Highway 2, Antioch is in an area dominated by the Sand Hills and alkaline lakes. During the late 1800s, large cattle ranches developed north of the community. At one time Antioch was a thriving community of over 700, but its population has dropped dramatically in recent years.

In 1886, the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy (CB&Q) Railroad completed a line through the southern third of Sheridan County and several stations were established along its route. A few developed into small communities. Originally known as Reno, Antioch was established in 1888. The small community was not much more than a post office. Because of confusion with mail with Reno, Nevada, the name was changed to Antioch in 1891. The name, selected by the W.G. Wilson family, was named for a town in either Iowa or Ohio.⁹³

The small community's population "boomed" in 1918 when World War I caused a shortage in the world's potash supply. Most of the potash – the chemical compound potassium carbonate – came from Germany and was used in the production of fertilizers, soap, glass, matches, and explosives, and for tanning, dyeing, and electro-plating photography.⁹⁴ Known as "Sand Hills Gold," the potash removed from the alkali-based lakes in the Sand Hills created a rush to the region, including to the counties of Sheridan, Garden, and Morrill. Antioch, Lakeside, and Hoffland in Sheridan County benefitted from the boom, although nothing remains of Hoffland which was



⁹² Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 137.

⁹³ Elton Perkey, *Perkey's Nebraska Place-Names* (Lincoln, Nebr.: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1982), 179; and Lilian L. Fitzpatrick, *Nebraska Place-Names* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 133.

⁹⁴ George E. Condra, *The Potash Industry of Nebraska* (Lincoln, Nebr.: Nebraska Bureau of Publicity, n.d.), 38.

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oats from 914,098 to 60,718; bushels of barley from 903,318 to 2,523; and bushels of rye from 42,180 bushels to 128.⁷¹

Government assistance to farmers and changes in farming practices began in the 1930s. The New Deal created the first federal programs to promote soil conservation. As early as 1933, the government took steps to control soil erosion by creating the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Soil Erosion Service of the Department of Interior. However, no comprehensive program was in place until the *Soil Conservation Act* of 1935 created the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) under the Department of Agriculture. The SCS encouraged states to pass legislation creating soil conservation districts. By 1938, 27 Midwestern states had passed laws creating soil conservation districts. By the end of the 1930s, the Great Plains Shelterbelt Project had planted 220 million trees and local, state, and federal agencies were promoting soil conservation.⁷²



Typical farmstead house (SH00-075) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

In 1937, under the *Federal Soil Conservation Act*, the Nebraska state legislature provided for the establishment of soil conservation districts and created a State Soil Conservation Committee. By 1940, the state had eight conservation districts, and in 1947, the Sheridan County Conservation District was established. The SCS offered technical assistance, free of charge, to any farmer or rancher in county. The program included development of conservation plans for an individual farm or ranch that may have encouraged terracing with planting of crops on the contour; crop rotation; irrigation systems; seeding poor land back to grass; drainage improvements; and shelterbelts.

Shelterbelts, or windbreaks, are very visible human changes to the landscape. In the 1950s the SCS program continued actively promoting shelterbelt planting. Most were planted around buildings and lots; however, in the Sand Hills some ranchers planted them to protect cattle in the winter. In 1952, 41,000 trees were furnished in the district. For about \$78, the soil district would provide and plant a five-row, quarter-mile-long shelterbelt. Tree planting was often done with the aid of the mechanical tree planter from the soil district that planted 500 to 1,000 trees an hour. Shelterbelt planting recommendations in the 1950s included:

- The north or east slopes should be the best site selection..
- The land should be left fallow the year before planting.

⁷¹ Agricultural crop data statistics were obtained from United States Census of Agriculture records.

⁷² Michael W. Shuyler, *The Dread of Plenty: Agricultural Relief Activities of the Federal Government in the Middle West, 1933-1939* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 1989), 128-129 and 219.

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- Trees for planting should include red cedar and ponderosa pine for evergreens; Chinese elm, native elm, hackberry, and honey locust for tall trees; and choke cherry, native plum, caragana, and honeysuckle for shrubs.
- Weeds should be kept under control.
- Trees that fail should be replanted the next year.
- Five to ten rows of trees should be planted with 12 to 15 feet between rows.
- Shelterbelts should be fenced to keep livestock out.

The SCS recommended red cedar and Chinese elm as some of the best tree varieties for Sheridan County. Windbreaks were important to prevent erosion but also saved fuel consumption. In 1951, the SCS estimated that a windbreak on the north side of buildings could save 25 percent on fuel consumption, while one on the north and west sides could save 34 percent. Some of the shelterbelts standing today were planted in the 1930s to 1950s with the encouragement and help of government programs. The benefits of shelterbelts have been proven, and government programs continue to encourage residents to plant and replant them throughout the region today.⁷³



Cattle moving to Ellsworth stockyards - late nineteenth century (SG)

The Sand Hills Region

Ranchers and Ranching Operations

In 1850 the Sand Hills were used primarily by Native Americans, but when the United States government removed the native population to reservations, cattle were introduced to the region. In 1867 there were only 115,000 head of cattle in the entire state. Within the next 90 years, the ranching industry grew to more than 4.5 million head of cattle statewide, making Nebraska third among states in total cattle.⁷⁴ The Sand Hills offered suitable land for grazing, which led to open-range ranching and a major regional industry. With the introduction of ranching, the landscape and settlement patterns of the Sand Hills underwent a transformation. Changes to the landscape during this transition included removal by ranchers of large cedar trees along the river to construct buildings and the introduction of new trails in the region.⁷⁵

⁷³ Information on shelterbelts was obtained from newspaper clippings in a scrapbook of the Sheridan County Soil Conservation Service Rushville, Nebraska.

⁷⁴ Nebraska Farmer (17 January 1959).

⁷⁵ McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 100.

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The benefits of cattle raising in the Sand Hills became apparent in 1870s. Severe winter storms of 1874 scattered cattle being brought to the Indian agencies west of the Sand Hills. The cattle drifted into the Sand Hills for protection from the storm, and many survived the winter. Four years later, cowboys on roundups discovered hundreds of fat cattle in the western Sand Hills and discovered a new area to successfully raise cattle.⁷⁶

During the late 1870s and early 1880s, several specific conditions led to the expansion of the cattle industry in the Sand Hills, including:

- Inexpensive cattle available from Texas
- Open-range grazing land available without taxes
- Local markets for beef at the Indian agencies
- Regional markets for cattle to the east and west⁷⁷

By 1878, the establishment of Indian agencies to the north of the Sand Hills increased the number of ranches along the Niobrara River and in the Sand Hills. Supplying beef to the agencies was profitable. For example, E.S. Newman, one of the first settlers of Sheridan County, delivered 250 head of cattle to the Pine Ridge Agency about every ten days.⁷⁸

Many ranchers arriving in the Sand Hills did not bother to file claims for the land and practiced open-range ranching. "The rancher simply selected the spot, built a ranch house, and his cattle grazed on the land 'from here to there.'"⁷⁹

Ranchers vs. Grangers

Open-range ranching practices did not mix well with the farmers that came to homestead in the Sand Hills in the 1880s. As farmers began to make land claims in the eastern Sand Hills, the open-range ranchers were forced to secure their headquarters with legal claims. They filed early claims to protect access to water or a good hay valley. Ranchers used hired hands, among others, to file for additional land using preemption claims and timber



Threshing outfit - late nineteenth century (NSHS)

⁷⁶ McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 88.

⁷⁷ McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 135.

⁷⁸ McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 105 and 127.

⁷⁹ McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 105.

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claims. Often claims were not filed adjacent to each other, in the hope that by dividing land the ranch could obtain control of more land.⁸⁰

Spade Ranch (500,000 acres)

Kinkaid Claim
Section, 640 acres

Homestead Claim
1/4 Section, 160 acres

In the early 1880s, cattlemen began constructing barbed wire drift fences to control grazing lands and to limit the large-scale open roundups of cattle in the spring that had become common. Settlers moving into southern Sheridan County brought the illegal fences to the attention of the federal government. The *Van Wyck Act* of 1885 forbade fencing of the public domain. But ranchers basically ignored this act, despite the fact that penalties could bring a fine of \$1,000 and a year in prison.⁸¹ The government was not very concerned with fencing by small ranchers but rather with the larger ranchers who fenced thousands of acres of government land.

Size of the Spade Ranch in 1909 vs. a homestead and Kinkaid Claim

In addition to illegal fencing, ranchers continued to fraudulently use many of the land acts to claim grazing lands, hay fields, and water supplies. For example, Bartlett Richard's and William Comstock's Nebraska Land and Feeding Company, among other ranching operations, fraudulently used the Civil War widows' claims of the *Soldiers' and Sailors' Act*. Widows were brought west on an all-expense-paid trip to file land claims that the ranchers would later purchase. In the case of the Bixby and Comstock's Spade Ranch, the widows' claims were filed in a linear pattern beginning in 1902 to control ownership of the ranch's fence lines.⁸² According to the law, ranchers were to make improvements to the property, usually a small shack. The widows were brought out to visit the claim six months later to see that improvements were being made. The visit often included a trip to the claim, lunch, and then a return to Ellsworth to catch the train east.⁸³

In *Old Jules*, Mari Sandoz presents the conflict between the farmers and the ranchers from the farmer's point of view. Her father, Old Jules, was often at the center of the controversy about the cattlemen's illegal filings and fencing of government land. In an excerpt of a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt, Jules words show how strongly he felt about it:

Jules wrote to Roosevelt once more, saying:—

This part of Nebraska is all fenced by stockmen who keep settlers away by misrepresentation, threats, and violence, and it is high time that the gov't step in to stop this lawlessness and avert further bloodshed which is coming surely if the small settler is not protected. It is almost

⁸⁰ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 117 and 143-144.

⁸¹ Delle, 26-27.

⁸² McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 208.

⁸³ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 219.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

In August 1906, additional charges were brought against the officials of the Spade Ranch for “conspiracy to defraud the government of title and use of public land, subornation of perjury, and conspiracy to suborn perjury.”⁸⁷ Richards and Comstock and two other Spade officials were found guilty. Their attempts at an appeal were denied. (See *The Spade Ranch* Section for further details of the trial.)

Post-Kinkaid Act

The Kinkaiders were different from the settlers of the 19th century. Kinkaiders are described in *Old Jules* as: “. . . not the home seekers of the eighties, young, optimistic, eager to battle wind and weather for their land. The Kinkaiders were mostly middle-aged, city-softened, dependent upon railroads and stores, too often set lone folk: bachelors, widowers, old maids, widows.”⁸⁸

Kinkaiders never really questioned why the government would give them 640 acres of land, and often they came to the Sand Hills with high expectations of making a living by farming. But they quickly learned that farming there was difficult. However, some Kinkaiders never came with the intention to farm, but instead planned to sell their homestead to the ranchers.⁸⁹ In *Old Jules*, Mari Sandoz described the *Kinkaid Act*: “The land was covered by filings that would never turn into farms. Yes, the *Kinkaid Act* was a cattleman law, as it was intended to be.”⁹⁰ Sandoz offers one opinion of the *Kinkaid Act*, but there were many settlers that came and did attempt to farm. By the 1910s, many Kinkaiders had patented land within some of the large ranches.

But farming was difficult, causing some to leave and others to mortgage their land. Many Kinkaiders unable to survive the stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression, and the droughts of the 1930s, left the Sand Hills. Others departed simply because they found farming difficult. Much of the landscape that had been homesteaded returned to openness, and ranching again became the dominant agricultural practice.

By 1930 more than a million acres of Sheridan County were used as pasture land for the county’s 91,911 cattle. Largely to support the county’s cattle industry, 127,370 acres of hay were planted in 1930.⁹¹

And there are the prosperous ones who stayed, ranchers now, their range deeded, safe from homesteaders and fence-cutting troops. Where once each valley held its own peculiar little home, now ten, fifteen miles reveal nothing except fat cattle, windmills, and haystack – dotted meadows.

Mari Sandoz, “The Kinkaid Comes and Goes” in Sandhill Sundays, 50.

⁸⁷ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 169.

⁸⁸ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 358.

⁸⁹ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 236-237.

⁹⁰ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 270.

⁹¹ *Fifteenth Census of the United States - Agriculture, 1930.*

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

impossible for the honest settler to get located because surveyors and locators are being driven out by continual criminal prosecution. I, for instance, have been locating settlers since 1884 and have been arrested four times on the pretense that I shot at somebody. The only other surveyor in this county able to find the maliciously obliterated and tampered-with corners is also being prosecuted on trumped-up charges. Settlers who dare enter the land inside of the illegal fences are driven out, their property destroyed, beaten to a jelly or killed. It is high time the government took a hand!⁸⁴

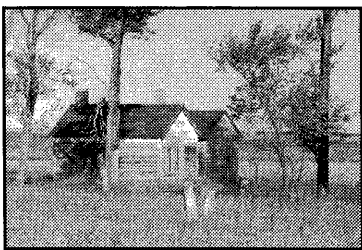
– From *Old Jules*

Conflict increased between the two groups in the early 20th century. The ranchers had fenced in thousand of acres of public domain, and the federal government began investigating land fraud and illegal fencing of government land.

The Kinkaid Act

The *Kinkaid Act* of 1904 opened further settlement of 15 counties, including Sheridan and offered 640-acre tracts for homestead claims. In Sheridan County, the *Kinkaid Act* forced settlers to think about settlement in the southern part of the county, where a claim of 640 acres was more feasible. As a result of the *Kinkaid Act* and increased settlement pressure in the area, the Spade Ranch holdings, once largely open range, was under patent by 1916. To maintain ranching operations, range land had to be leased or bought from the homesteaders.

Before passage of the *Kinkaid Act*, ranchers tried to convince Washington officials that land in the Sand Hills was not suitable for farming, and that it would be difficult to make a living, even with 640 acres. The ranchers advocated the designation of the area as grassland, which they viewed as more valuable than its use as cropland.⁸⁵



De Wolf Homestead/Kinkaid shack in Sheridan County (SH00-083) - potentially eligible for the NRHP

In 1903, the Department of the Interior began to indict people for illegal fencing. The first Nebraska fencing case was brought to trial in May 1905 against John and Herman Krause, ranchers of Box Butte and Sheridan Counties. The most famous of the “fencing trials” began with charges against the officials of the expansive and powerful Spade Ranch. In 1905, Bartlett Richards and William Comstock were charged and pled guilty to “asserting ownership and exclusive occupancy of government lands.”⁸⁶ The two served a sentence of six hours and a paid a fine of \$300 and half of the court costs.

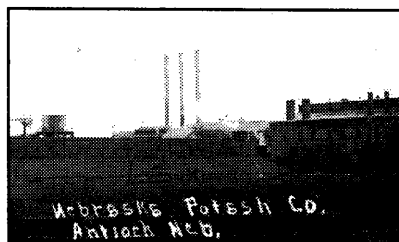
⁸⁴ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 243-244.

⁸⁵ Bartlett Richards, Jr. and Ruth Van Ackeren, *Bartlett Richards: Nebraska Sandhills Cattleman* (Lincoln, Nebr.: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1980), 145.

⁸⁶ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 145.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

located between Alliance and Antioch. Western Nebraska potash was used for fertilizer production for the cotton fields of the southern United States and supplied two-fifths of the U.S. potash.⁹⁵ Jess Lake, which was east of Lakeside, produced the largest quantity of potash in the county and the state during the potash boom.⁹⁶



Potash Plant in Antioch - early twentieth century (KM)

Of the three Sheridan County communities benefitting from potash production, Antioch received the largest boom, with five companies establishing plants in the area. Between 1916 and 1918, the three most successful plants, the American, Nebraska, and Alliance Companies were constructed, bringing many workers to the area.⁹⁷ The American Potash Company, considered the largest of the five, was the most successful with a production of 100 tons per day.⁹⁸ Later the National and Western potash plants were built.

Antioch grew rapidly during World War I, which Mari Sandoz describes in *Old Jules*:

The sign, RENO P.O. . . was gone. In the sandy pocket a new town, Antioch, spread like a dark smudge from the tall flues rising over the big tar-paper hulks that were the evaporating plants, housing several vertical boilers each, with intricate coilings of pipe.⁹⁹

By 1918 the industry was centered around five or six company towns, with housing and boarding facilities for workmen and their families. The town of Antioch boasted a hotel, two banks, four restaurants, scores of homes, supply stores, schools, and churches.¹⁰⁰ During World War I, H.A. Copsey established the Antioch State



The once thriving downtown of Antioch - early twentieth century (KM)

⁹⁵ Condra, 38; and Shumway, 437.

⁹⁶ Shumway, 438.

⁹⁷ Richard Jensen, "Antioch Potash Plants National Register Nomination," 1979.

⁹⁸ Condra, 38.

⁹⁹ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 400.

¹⁰⁰ "Won't Relive During War," *Omaha World Herald Magazine* (n.d.), Antioch Potash Files, Knight Museum, Alliance, Nebraska.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

Bank, and W.H. Ostenberg started the Potash State Bank which were consolidated as the Potash State Bank in 1921.¹⁰¹ A two-year high school operated in Antioch between 1912 and 1942.¹⁰²

In 1920 the official population of Antioch peaked at 764, although some sources estimate the community at well over 1,500 people during the war.¹⁰³ About a year after the end of World War I, Germany was back in the potash market and the Antioch potash plants closed for good. The owners abandoned the plants, leaving only ruins of the successful potash operations. "... with the end of the war the potash fortunes melted like snow before the bite of the chinook. Once more the Panhandle settled into monotony . . ."¹⁰⁴ Antioch remained a small, but viable community until World War II, when the majority of the houses were moved from the community onto ranches or into Alliance.¹⁰⁵

Bingham

The small, unincorporated community of Bingham is in the southeast corner of the county along the CB&Q Railroad line and Highway 2. Bingham was established as a station and post office on the railroad line in 1888. The origin of the name is unclear, although it may have been named for a local resident, a railroad man, or for Bingham, Minnesota.¹⁰⁶



Bingham Bank (SH02-001)

Shortly after the community was established in 1888, the District 85 elementary school was organized. School-age children from Bingham and surrounding ranches attended classes at a frame building until a brick high school (SH02-003) – which accommodated 11 students in three grades – was built in 1918. With the World War II teacher shortage, the small high school closed in 1948. Students now attend school in Hyannis (Grant County) or Oshkosh (Garden County).

¹⁰¹ A Century of Progress: Sheridan County, Nebraska, 1885-1985 (Rushville, Nebr.: Rushville Centennial Committee, 1985), 17.

¹⁰² Nebraska High School Historical Society, Inc., Pages of History: Nebraska High Schools, Present and Past, Public and Private, 1854-1994 (Lincoln, Nebr.: Nebraska High School Historical Society, Inc., 1994), 719.

¹⁰³ Perkey, 179; and George R. Morgan, "Landscape Changes Associated with Nebraska's Potash Industry," Fred T. Hanson Binder, Knight Museum, Alliance, Nebr.

¹⁰⁴ Sandoz, Old Jules, 407.

¹⁰⁵ Morgan, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Fitzpatrick, 133.

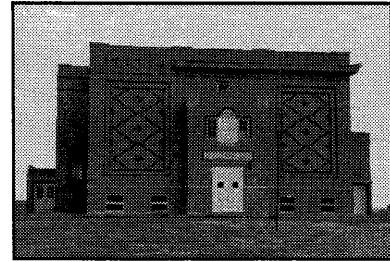
Historic Overview of Sheridan County

Because it was too far east of the alkali lakes that produced the potash, Bingham never experienced a boom in population like Antioch or Lakeside. The community had a population of only 20 in 1890, although historically it has remained at around 100 people.¹⁰⁷ Bingham reached its peak population of 149 in 1940.¹⁰⁸

At the beginning of the twentieth century, businesses in Bingham included two general stores, a lumber yard, a hotel, and a bank.¹⁰⁹ The businesses all closed, and the bank building is the only commercial building now standing (SH02-001). The First Congregational Church of Bingham (SH02-002) is only church in the community. Built in 1909, the wood frame church is still an active congregation.

Clinton

Located between Gordon and Rushville along U.S. Highway 20, Clinton was established in 1883 when Abel J. Love filed a claim in the area. One year later, the Pioneer Town Site Company platted the town, and by 1885 the Fremont, Elkhorn, and Missouri Valley Railroad (FE&MV) extended its line from Valentine through the area. A post office was established with Love as postmaster who named the town after Clinton, Iowa.¹¹⁰



*Clinton High School, erected in 1916
(SH03-001)*

The railroad encouraged development of a mercantile store, several churches, the first school, and the Clinton State Bank, organized in 1917 by Noah Moss.¹¹¹ The town incorporated in 1920, extending its city limits 36 square miles to qualify for incorporation. During the Great Depression, however, the city limits were reduced to their current size because of conflict with farmers who did not want to pay village taxes.¹¹²

Settlers established the District 26 elementary school shortly after they began arriving in 1885.¹¹³ By 1916 they built a three-story, brick high school building (SH03-001) to accommodate 12 students in three grades. They built an addition in 1934, but the shortage of teachers during World War II closed

¹⁰⁷ Nebraska State Gazetteer, Business Directory and Farmers List for 1890-91 (Omaha, Nebr.: J.M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, 1890).

¹⁰⁸ Perkey, 179.

¹⁰⁹ A Century of Progress, 8.

¹¹⁰ Perkey, 179.

¹¹¹ A Century of Progress, 17.

¹¹² Graff, 115.

¹¹³ Nebraska High School Historical Society, Inc., 715.

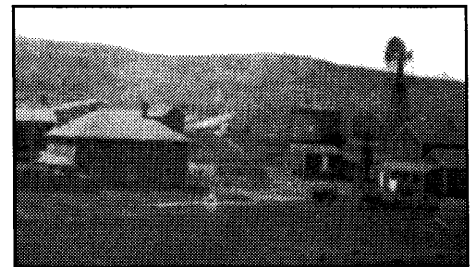
Historic Overview of Sheridan County

the high school in 1945. Students now attend high school in either Rushville or Gordon, although the building is used for an elementary school.

Clinton's population in 1930 was 157, although one year later it began a steady decline and the post office closed in 1959.¹¹⁴ Because of improved transportation methods, the business community faltered. During the automobile era, it was easier to travel to the larger communities of Rushville and Gordon for shopping. The community now has a population of 33 and maintains a grain elevator (SH03-002) and the school.

Ellsworth¹¹⁵

The unincorporated community of Ellsworth is in the southern Sand Hills ranching area of the county. It was established on the CB&Q Railroad as an early cattle shipping post for the Spade Ranch in the 1880s. Before 1887, there were only a depot, school, and section house in Ellsworth.



Historic view of Ellsworth - early twentieth century (SG)

In 1898, the owners of the Spade Ranch – Bartlett Richards and William Comstock – headquartered their Nebraska Land and Feeding Company in Ellsworth. That same year, they built a large general store (SH04-002) and stockyards for the company along the railroad tracks. Richard's summer home (SH04-001) north of the store and also built in 1898, was noted for having an exterior entrance to every room. The Nebraska Land and Feeding Company also built a hotel and a livery barn. The hotel served the CB&Q Railroad whose passenger train stopped once each day.¹¹⁶ A post office, established in 1904, was located in the Spade Store.¹¹⁷ School District 119 was organized in 1896, and between 1896 and 1932 three different buildings were used: a sod building, a frame, and the current frame school, built in 1932 (SH04-003).

Ellsworth's only church was St. Bernard's Parish Catholic Church.¹¹⁸ South of the railroad tracks, the church and a cemetery (SH00-136) were built in 1913 with funds and land donated by Barney Reid.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Perkey, 179; and W.A. Woodward, Sheridan County Nebraska Post Offices 1849-1970 (N.p. n.d.), Nebraska State Historical Society Archives Library, Lincoln, Nebr., 19.

¹¹⁵ History of Ellsworth from Scrapbook, collection of Stephanie Graham; and Sheridan County Historical Society, "Recollections" of Sheridan County Nebraska (Nebr.: Iron Man Industries, 1976), 14.

¹¹⁶ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 92.

¹¹⁷ Perkey, 179.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Stephanie Graham, 23 November 1997.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Stephanie Graham, 1 April 1998.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

Father Manning from Alliance traveled by train every Sunday to perform mass in the small church. In 1940, services were discontinued and the church was demolished.

In 1947, the community purchased a barracks building from the Alliance Airbase for \$900 and opened the Highland Gun Club (SH04-004), which was used for civil defense training.¹²⁰ In 1961 the community converted the building into a three-lane bowling alley, now the Highland Bowling Club. The population of Ellsworth reached its peak of 30 in 1930.¹²¹ The only businesses remaining are the general store, which still operates as a store and post office, and the bowling alley.

Gordon

The largest community in Sheridan County, Gordon is located along U.S. Highway 20 in the northern third of the county. The surrounding area is associated with ranching to the south and farming to the north. The Spade Ranch (SH00-030), historically one of the largest in the county, was located south of the community. Nebraska author Mari Sandoz and her father, Jules Sandoz, are often associated with the town of Gordon. The Sandoz family lived south of the community, and family members still operate an orchard on Jules' land. Sandoz helped settle the area around Gordon during the homesteading years by assisting immigrants in locating their claims.¹²²



Historic view of Gordon, c. 1910 (SCHS)

Reverend John Scamahorn from Sullivan, Indiana, came to the area with a small number of settlers in 1884, establishing a small community near the present-day town of Gordon. However, when the FE&MV completed its line across the county in 1885, the railroad bypassed the community. The Scamahorn settlement moved one mile west and organized the community of Gordon. The community was named in honor of John Gordon who had attempted to travel to the Black Hills during the gold rush during the 1870s.¹²³ Because the land was not then open to white settlers, the U.S. cavalry sent Gordon and his party back to Iowa and Gordon served time in jail.

¹²⁰ Interview with LeRoy Loudon, 18 November 1997.

¹²¹ Perkey, 179.

¹²² "Pageant of the Plains: Gordon Area Diamond Jubilee, 1885-1960" (Gordon, Nebr., 1960), 21.

¹²³ The Centennial Book Committee. *The History of Gordon, Nebraska, 1885-1985*, Vol. 1 (Dallas, TX: Curtis Media Corporation, 1984), 23.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

Shortly after the organization of Gordon, a post office was established with Scamahorn as postmaster.¹²⁴ By 1885, the community incorporated with a population of 500. The community also opened its first school in 1885 with a total of 27 students. By 1924, the community had constructed a modern brick school and made additions in 1960.¹²⁵

The early decades of the twentieth century brought significant changes to the small community. The town grew rapidly, achieving a population of 650 by 1904.¹²⁶ Early businesses in the community included a flour mill; grain elevator; two banks – the First National and Gordon State; six mercantile stores and three millinery shops; three restaurants; a bakery; three barber shops; and three blacksmiths. Two newspapers – *The Democrat* and *The Journal* – provided weekly and semi-weekly news to the area.¹²⁷ Seventy-five businesses were operating in the city by 1930, and by 1940, over 130.¹²⁸

Along with several businesses, public works was also improved during the 1910s. During this era, public works improvements included electric lights and a power system, a telegraph and telephone system, a sewer treatment plant, and a waterworks.¹²⁹ In 1930, city delivery of mail was established.¹³⁰ Gordon has historically been the chief trading point of Sheridan County. By the 1910s, the town shipped more than 30 bushels of wheat to the acre, along with 70 bushels of oats, 150 bushels of potatoes, 35 bushels of rye, and 4½ tons of alfalfa.¹³¹

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, houses and other buildings were constructed in the city. By 1930, over 350 homes were standing within the city limits of Gordon.¹³² Two architects, Sidney H. Foster and C.H. Sailor, designed several business buildings and homes in and around Gordon. Two of the most important builders in the city included Karl Tuchenhausen and Glenn Conklin, both of whom built many structures in the community.

¹²⁴ Perkey, 179.

¹²⁵ The Centennial Book Committee, 74.

¹²⁶ Nebraska: Our Towns, 118.

¹²⁷ City Directory of Gordon for 1915-1916. (Paul E. Brown, publisher). Located in the Scamahorn Museum Files, Gordon, Nebr.

¹²⁸ 1940 City Directory. Located in the Scamahorn Museum, Gordon, Nebr.

¹²⁹ City Directory of Gordon for 1915-1916.

¹³⁰ "Pageant of the Plains," 49.

¹³¹ City Directory of Gordon for 1915-1916.

¹³² City Directory of Gordon for 1915-1916.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

Social and religious organizations and activities developed early in the community. The first county fair was held in Gordon in 1885, and it's been held there every year since.¹³³ Five churches were located in the community during the early twentieth century. A Music and Drama Club, American Legion, the International Order of Odd Fellows, Rebekahs, Job's Daughters, Sheridan County Agricultural Society, Eastern Star, Masons, and the PEO Sisterhood were all active organizations in Gordon. The Masonic Lodge, organized in 1889, is one of the oldest fraternal organizations in the town.¹³⁴ In 1942, the community constructed a municipal auditorium with money from a \$25,000 bond issue and workers from the WPA.¹³⁵

By 1930, the community was classified as a city, and between 1930 and 1940 the population increased again to almost 2,000. Gordon reached its peak population in 1960 with 2,223.¹³⁶ Population in Gordon and throughout Sheridan County then steadily declined, but the community still boasts the largest in the county with 1,803 people. Gordon still has an active business district, with grocery and clothing stores and other businesses.

Hay Springs¹³⁷

The community of Hay Springs is at the far western edge of the county along the U.S. Highway 20. Originally known as Moakler, the community organized a post office in December 1884. Nine months later in September 1885, the community changed its name to Hay Springs because of its location in the center of meadow country where the soil is moistened by springs.¹³⁸ In 1886, the FE&MV Railroad completed its line across the northern third of the state. Hay Springs became a dropoff center for immigrants to the county being located by Jules Sandoz whose original homestead was located south of Hay Springs.



Hay Springs, c. 1890 (SCHS)

Because the Burlington Railroad had not yet completed its line through southern Sheridan County, the FE&MV provided transportation as far as Hay Springs for settlers going to Box Butte County.

¹³³ "Pageant of the Plains, 41.

¹³⁴ The Gordon Journal 24 August 1960.

¹³⁵ "Pageant of the Plains," 49.

¹³⁶ Perkey, 179.

¹³⁷ The history of Hay Springs from The Hay Springs Centennial Book Committee, The History of Hay Springs, Nebraska and the Surrounding Area: The First 100 Years, 1885-1985 (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1985); and "Hay Springs, Nebraska" file, Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, Lincoln, Nebr.

¹³⁸ Perkey, 180.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

This made Hay Springs a thriving community during the late 1880s and early 1890s. The population of the community stood at 378 in 1890, and many businesses opened their doors. At that time the town had two general mercantile stores, two hardware stores, one bank, a furniture store, a wagon maker, one blacksmith, three hotels, one grocery store, two lumber yards, three real estate agents, two saloons, one livery, a doctor, and two plumbers. By 1889 the community supported two newspapers, the Hay Springs Times and the Standard, and in 1891 began grading the streets.

The first school was an elementary school, but by 1895 the community established a high school.¹³⁹ In 1920 enrollment stood at 60, and Hay Springs built a new building in 1921 (SH06-024). Over the years, the community made several changes to the campus. In 1934 they built an agriculture building to the rear of the school, and added wooden barracks buildings as wings during the 1940s. In 1940 they built a large brick addition to the high school.



Zion Lutheran Church in Hay Springs
(SH06-013) – potentially eligible for the
NRHP

Through its early years, Hay Springs remained successful in its business and agricultural development. The Hay Springs Creamery opened in 1900. In 1910, Hay Springs helped Sheridan County to produce and ship more than 700,000 bushels of potatoes, and by 1928 Hay Springs was the county's heaviest shipping center for hogs, cattle, and produce.¹⁴⁰ Population steadily increased, with 408 people in 1910 and 577 in 1920.

Social and religious activities in the community also developed. In 1898 the community sponsored social organizations that included a Masonic lodge; an Odd Fellows lodge; Grand Army of the Republic; Modern Woodmen of America; Rebekah Lodge; and Home Forum. By 1900 there were several churches in the community. The Congregationalists built their wood frame church in 1887 (SH06-007). Other churches in the community include the St. Columbkille Catholic Church, United Methodist Church, and the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church. Modern structures have replaced most of the original churches.

Hay Springs has remained a viable community since its start in 1884. Population steadily increased, peaking at 1,091 people in 1950.¹⁴¹ Although the community's population has declined in the last 40 years (now 693), its business community remains vital. A grocery store, hardware store, pharmacy, and restaurant currently line the main street.

¹³⁹ Nebraska High School Historical Society, Inc., 717.

¹⁴⁰ Hay Springs City Directory, 1928, located at the Hay Springs Research Center, Hay Springs, Nebr.

¹⁴¹ Perkey, 180.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

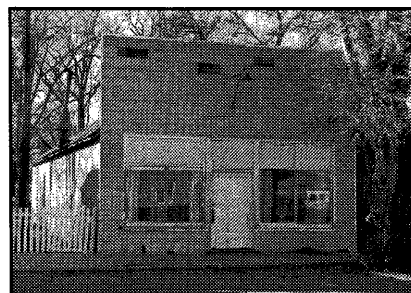
Lakeside¹⁴²

Named for its location along a large lake, Lakeside is in the south central part of the county along the CB&Q Railroad and State Highway 2. After the railroad came through the county in the 1880s, Lakeside was established in 1888 as a post office. The community is surrounded by several large Sand Hills ranches. This unincorporated community also experienced a small boom during the potash period of World War I.

In 1899 Charlie Tully, Ira Skiles, John Lunsford, and Luther Phipps – all of them cattlemen – established the earliest business, the Lakeside Mercantile Company. The company remained one of the largest businesses in town through the 1910s. Lakeside grew, and by 1916 the first church and the Lakeside State Bank had been built. Around the same time the Hord Potash Company, the Central Hotel, an opera house, and a weekly paper were Lakeside businesses. The Standard Potash Company, just outside of Lakeside, opened and closed in 1918, because World War I ended that same year. The office of the Standard Potash Company is now used as a residence (SH00-088).

At the end of World War I and the potash boom, Lakeside's population declined. This was aggravated by a fire in 1919 that destroyed most of the community's Main Street – including the opera house, hotel, and newspaper building – leaving only the bank, the mercantile store, and the pool hall.

Lakeside School District 91, established in 1888, built its two-story brick building (SH07-002) during the potash boom of World War I, but closed its high school during World War II. The building is still used as an elementary and junior high school.



*Commercial building in Lakeside
(SH07-006)*

Lakeside has always been a small community. Although rumored to have reached a population of over 550 in 1918, the census indicates that its peak population was reached in 1940 when 152 people lived in the community. Currently, Lakeside retains several commercial buildings along its Main Street (SH06-004) as well as a modern restaurant along State Highway 2.



*Sheridan County Courthouse in Rushville
(SH08-001) – listed on the NRHP*

Rushville

The community of Rushville is located along U.S. Highway 20 in the northern portion of Sheridan County. In 1884 a post office was established at the settlement of Rush Valley, two miles north of the present location of Rushville. In 1885 when the FE&MV Railroad completed a line through the area, the community was literally moved to its current location. The buildings were torn

¹⁴² History of Lakeside from Perkey, 180; and A Century of Progress, 8.

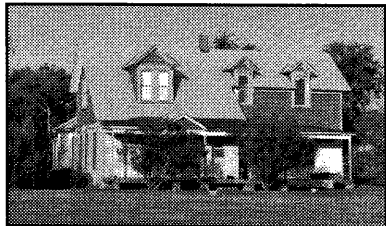
Historic Overview of Sheridan County

down, board by board, and rebuilt along the railroad.¹⁴³ The new community was platted by the Pioneer Townsite Company and incorporated in 1885. That same year the town was elected county seat, although a dispute over the vote delayed official designation until 1888.¹⁴⁴ The large courthouse (SH08-001), built in 1904, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).



Rushville, c. 1887 (NSHS)

The railroad brought new settlers to the area and as the government center, the community attracted more businesses. Because of its location on the railroad and its distance of 20 miles from the Oglala Sioux Reservation at Pine Ridge, Rushville was chosen in the 1890s as the sight for a large warehouse for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (SH08-033). The first newspaper, the Sheridan County Sun, was operated by Frank Sprague, and C.M. Wood edited the Rushville Standard. Other businesses included the Morse and Shepard General Store, a lumberyard, James Clark's grist mill, a blacksmith, and the Bank of Rushville. By 1928, the city boasted two lumber yards, two hotels, several churches, two hospitals, a library, post office, roller mill, flour mill, and two pumping stations.¹⁴⁵



Residence in Rushville (SH08-031) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Over the years, large benefactors funded parks and public buildings in the community. Donations to the city included funding for the Methodist Church (SH08-029) donated by H.O. Morse; funding for the Lutheran Church (SH08-028) donated by Ida and Bill Holzberger; funds for the elementary school and half of the Masonic Lodge from Mr. and Mrs. Cravath; establishment of the Sheridan County Historical Society by Carl Lockmon; and funding for the hospital by Albert Dale.¹⁴⁶

The two largest contributors were the Modisett brothers, Albert, a rancher, and Mayre, a banker. The Modisett family, prominent West Virginians, came to Sheridan County in the 1880s.¹⁴⁷ The eldest son, Albert, came to establish a ranch along Deer Creek and was joined by his mother Nancy, brother Mayre, and sister Rosa who homesteaded on adjoining land. Always of the genteel class, Albert Modisett was never known to be a "Nebraska Cowboy," preferring to wear a dress shirt and tie.

¹⁴³ Sandoz, Old Jules, 64.

¹⁴⁴ Barbara Beving Long, "Sheridan County Courthouse National Register Nomination," 1989.

¹⁴⁵ Sanborn Map Company, Rushville, Nebraska, 1928.

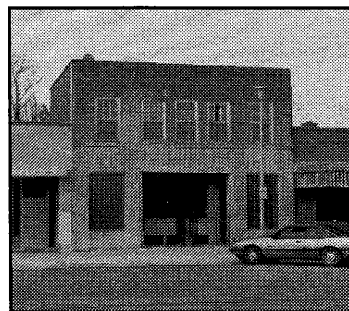
¹⁴⁶ Graff, 114.

¹⁴⁷ History of the Modisett family from Sheridan County Historical Society, "Recollections", 482-484.

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

By the 1920s, the Modisetts owned a large portion of Sheridan County that they had obtained through foreclosure on many homesteaders to whom they'd made personal loans. Albert married a West Virginian who later divorced him, Mayre never married, and Rosa married and divorced a Mr. Corder. Albert died in a car accident in 1936.

His will made bequests to several individuals, and the remainder of his estate was left in trust for Rushville as long as the town observed the terms of the will. He specified donations for an older men's Modisett Club (SH08-032), Modisett Airport, Modisett City Hall with Swimming Pool, Fairview Cemetery (SH00-081), the Masonic Hall (SH08-016), and the Modisett City Park and Baseball Park (SH08-034). His will specified that no "kittenball" (softball) would be played on the baseball diamond, so a new softball park was built near the golf course. When Mayre died, a portion of his estate also went to the city. Rosa constructed a public women's restroom (SH08-005) in downtown Rushville as a meeting place for women. The family left enough money to the community to maintain all the donated facilities.



Rosa M. Corder Restroom in Rushville (SH08-005) - potentially eligible for the NRHP

During the early twentieth century, Rushville's population increased, reaching a peak of 1,266 residents in 1950.¹⁴⁸ Since the 1950s, the population declined to 1,228 by 1960 and to 1,127 today.

Whiteclay¹⁴⁹

Whiteclay is Sheridan County's northernmost community. Located along the border of Nebraska and South Dakota, the small community is two miles south of the Pine Ridge Oglala Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. The area around Whiteclay was settled between 1878 and 1883, when the area was still inhabited by the Oglala Sioux. Because the land had not yet been divided and legally put up for sale, most early settlers took "squatter's rights" on the land. When the country opened up for settlement in the 1880s, these early settlers filed their claims in Valentine at the U.S. Land Office.

A post office was established along Whiteclay Creek in 1904. In 1919, a community was established northeast of the post office. The community, known as Dewing, was platted in 1919 by Paul Brown on land donated by Mr. and Mrs. Tom Dewing. In the late 1930s, the Whiteclay post office moved to Dewing, and the community's name unofficially changed to Whiteclay. The community retained a small population, reaching its peak in 1940 with 112 people.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Perkey, 181.

¹⁴⁹ History of Whiteclay from "Soddies to Satellites," 29 and A Century of Progress, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Perkey, 180.

Survey of Sheridan County

Survey of Sheridan County

Research Design

Objectives

The NeHBS retained Mead & Hunt to identify and document the county's significant historic, architectural, and landscape resources. We evaluated previously surveyed properties and newly identified resources for National Register of Historic Places eligibility and their potential to contribute to a historic district. In the project's intensive survey phase, we identified, documented, and completed thematic research related to two themes – the life and works of native author Mari Sandoz, and the Spade Ranch and its owners.

Methodology

Background Research – Before we began fieldwork, we investigated published information about the history, culture, and climate of Sheridan County, the Spade Ranch, and the life and works of author Mari Sandoz. We completed research at the following repositories:

Nebraska State Historical Society Library
University of Nebraska – Lincoln Library and Archives
Sheridan County Historical Society
Chadron State College Library and Sandoz Collection
Gordon Public Library

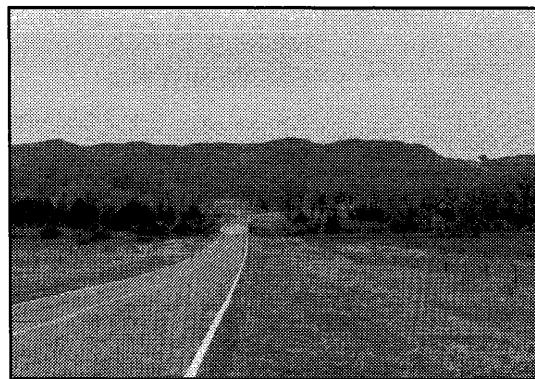
Rushville Public Library
Scamahorn Museum in Gordon
Mari Sandoz Room in Gordon
Hay Springs Museum
Knight Museum in Alliance

We also collected information on previously surveyed properties from the NeSHPO, including site files, photo cards, maps, and related historic contexts.

The NeSHPO staff and Mead & Hunt participated in two public meetings in Sheridan County – in Lakeside and in Rushville – to provide local residents with information about the survey. We encouraged local residents to share information on local history and sites on private or otherwise inaccessible property. At both meetings, Mead & Hunt gained valuable information from local contacts.

Field Survey – During the October-November 1997 reconnaissance field survey, Mead & Hunt drove identified and known public roads and streets to identify properties with historic and architectural significance. Properties included met the evaluation considerations outlined in the *Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey Manual* (July 9, 1997). Generally, the NeHBS uses the National Park Service guidelines for survey that a property must:

- Be at least 50 years old
- Be in its original location
- Retain its physical integrity



Highway 250 crossing the Niobrara River

Survey of Sheridan County

According to NeHBS guidelines, we included properties that fall a few years outside the 50-year mark if they were significant or unusual property types. For a property to retain integrity, its present appearance must closely resemble its original one. Alterations to buildings include replacing original with modern materials – such as new windows or porches – building additions, and installing modern siding materials. We did not add to the survey properties that have undergone too many changes and applied integrity issues most stringently to houses, because they're the most common resource recorded during historic building surveys.

We evaluated farmsteads and complexes of buildings as a whole. If the primary building of a farmstead or complex did not retain integrity, we did not survey associated buildings – although we made exceptions for rare property types such as the large, well-maintained frame horse-and- cattle barns in the Sand Hills. We included abandoned properties in the survey if they appeared to date before the turn of the century, were a rare property type, or exhibited regional construction materials such as sod or stone.



Example of a large barn identified (SH00-092) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

We also evaluated Sheridan County's commercial buildings individually and for their potential to contribute to a commercial historic district. In accordance with NeHBS guidelines, we acknowledge that the first-floor storefronts of commercial buildings have often been modernized, yet that alone did not eliminate them from the survey. If a building retained historic wall surfaces,

cornices, and second-level window openings, we included it in the survey.

Using the criteria of the NeHBS manual, we reevaluated and documented previously surveyed properties. We updated the photo card and took new photographs if the property retained integrity and we evaluated it as contributing. We documented newly surveyed properties according to the NeHBS manual, which requires preparing a field form and a taking a minimum of two black-and-white photographs. During the evaluation, we related properties to the historic contexts and property types developed by the NeSHPO and included in the NeHBS manual. We recorded all newly and previously surveyed properties on maps.

The Sheridan County survey includes the intensive study of two topics: the life and writings of Mari Sandoz and the Spade Ranch and its owners. We identified properties related to these two topics and documented them according to NeHBS manual procedures, including field forms, photographs, color slides, and sketch site plans.

We evaluated reconnaissance and intensive survey properties for their potential to be eligible for the NRHP (see *Recommendations*). The NRHP is the official federal list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. A property can be significant at the local, state, or national level. To qualify as eligible for the NRHP, properties must be at least 50 years old and possess historic significance and integrity.

Survey of Sheridan County

To be listed on the NRHP, a property's significance must be demonstrated by one or more of the following criteria established by the National Park Service:

- *Criterion A – Association with events or activities that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.*
- *Criterion B – Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.*
- *Criterion C – Association with the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*
- *Criterion D – Potential to provide important information about prehistory or history.*

Generally, cemeteries, birthplaces, grave sites, religious properties, moved buildings, reconstructed properties, commemorative properties, and properties that have achieved significance within the last 50 years are considered ineligible for listing. However, they may qualify if they fall into one of the following categories:

- Religious properties deriving significance from architectural or artistic distinction.
- Moved properties that are significant for architectural value.
- Birthplaces or grave sites if there is no other appropriate site directly associated with an significant person's public life.
- Cemeteries that derive primary significance from graves associated with important people, from age, or distinctive design features.
- Reconstructed buildings when built in a suitable environment.
- Commemorative properties with significant design, age, tradition, or symbolic value.
- Properties less than 50 years old that are of primary importance.

Also important in the determination of eligibility of a property is integrity. Integrity is defined as the ability of a property to convey its significance. A property's integrity must be evident through historic qualities including:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| • location | • design |
| • setting | • materials |
| • workmanship | • feeling |
| • association | |

The seven elements of integrity are defined in the *Glossary of Architectural Terms*.

Survey of Sheridan County

After completing the fieldwork and the intensive survey, we compiled field data and historical information for input in the NeHBS database and prepared this report on historical information, survey results, and recommendations for NRHP listing. Products submitted to the NeSHPO include the survey report, photograph contact sheets, negatives, color slides, maps, site plans, and research files.

Limitations and Biases of the Survey

We limited the survey to the properties and historic resources identifiable from the public right-of-way. In some cases, properties were not visible because they were set back from the right-of-way or obscured by foliage. However, local citizens pointed out several sites not visible from the right-of-way during the public meetings. After obtaining permission, we documented these sites and included them in the survey.

Survey Results

The NeHBS of Sheridan County evaluated 272 properties, including 129 properties resurveyed. For the intensive survey of the Spade Ranch, we surveyed seven properties. We identified seven properties relating to the life and writings of Mari Sandoz. The following tables detail the property types surveyed in the rural area and each community.

Numerical Summary of Survey Results

Table 1. Sheridan County reconnaissance survey summary

Area/NeHBS Prefix	Properties Surveyed Before 1997	Properties Surveyed in 1997-98	Total Properties Evaluated
Rural (SH00)	55	82	137
Antioch (SH01)	12	1	13
Bingham (SH02)	3	1	4
Clinton (SH03)	0	2	2
Ellsworth (SH04)	2	2	4
Gordon (SH05)	16	31	47
Hay Springs (SH06)	19	5	24
Lakeside (SH07)	4	3	7
Rushville (SH08)	18	17	35
Whiteclay (SH09)	0	0	0
Total	129	144	272

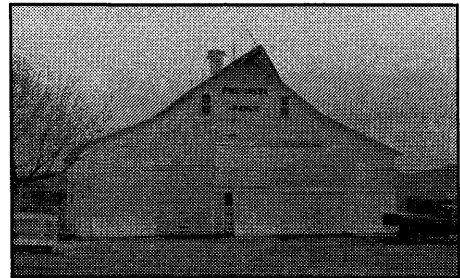
Survey of Sheridan County

Table 2. Summary of contributing resources – Sheridan County reconnaissance survey

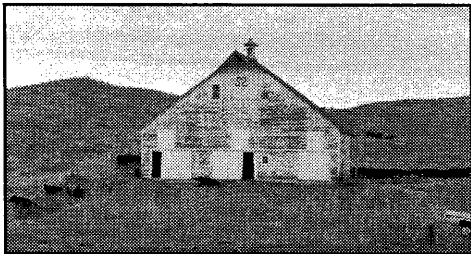
Area/NeHBS Prefix	Properties	Buildings	Sites	Structures	Objects
Rural (SH00) ¹⁵¹	97	206	17	42	0
Antioch (SH01)	2	2	0	0	0
Bingham (SH02)	4	4	0	0	0
Clinton (SH03)	2	1	0	1	0
Ellsworth (SH04)	4	6	0	0	0
Gordon (SH05)	41	45	0	7	0
Hay Springs (SH06)	11	13	0	0	0
Lakeside (SH07)	5	8	0	0	0
Rushville (SH08)	27	30	1	1	0
Whiteclay (SH09)	0	0	0	0	0
Total	193	315	18	51	0

Illustrated Discussion of Significant Historic Contexts

Our reconnaissance survey of Sheridan County identified properties that relate to historic contexts outlined by the NeSHPO. Each historic context details the history of a particular theme as related to the state of Nebraska, and each contains distinct property types. In Sheridan County, we identified nine significant historic contexts. The following discussion presents each of the historic contexts through an illustration of related properties identified in the reconnaissance survey.



Pine Creek Ranch Barn (SH00-120)



Typical Ranch Barn (SH00-119)

Agriculture

The agriculture context groups property types related to food production, including crops and livestock. Within Sheridan County, we identified farmsteads and ranches associated with this theme. The farms often contained a main house, barns, grain bins, storage buildings, garages, machine sheds, chicken coops, windmills, cellars, water storage tanks, and shelterbelts. Ranches often included a main house, barns, garages, and outbuildings but also contained specialized building types such

as corrals, branding pens, loading chutes, roping chutes, cattle guards, and calving sheds. Modern barns and utility buildings, often of metal construction, are commonly seen throughout the county. Some

¹⁵¹ The number of rural properties evaluated as contributing does not include 13 properties we were unable to reevaluate from the public right-of-way and the 7 surveyed properties of the potash plant ruins considered to be archaeological sites.

Survey of Sheridan County

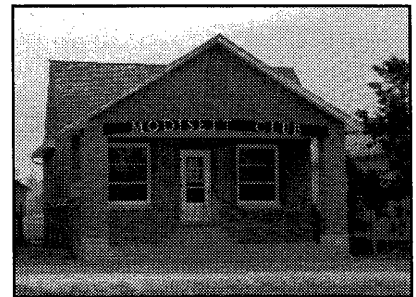
ranches in southern Sheridan County retain historic, well-maintained, frame horse and cattle barns that often have front gables.

The Mirage Flats Irrigation District (SH00-065) also relates to the agriculture context. During the 1940s, a system of canals was constructed to provide water to farmers in the area south of Hay Springs. The district headquarters is south of Hay Springs and consists of houses, an office building, and storage sheds.

We recommend six farmsteads, one ranch, and the Mirage Flats Irrigation District related to the historic context of agriculture as potentially eligible for the NRHP. (See *Recommendations*).

Association

The association context relates to organizations of people, other than religious or governmental, that have a common interest. The reconnaissance survey identified properties related to service organizations and a community card club. These organizations often erected one-to-three story, brick buildings to house their activities. For example, Gordon features the IOOF Hall and the Masonic Temple.



Modisett Club in Rushville (SH08-032) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Three association-related properties are recommended as potentially eligible for the NRHP. (See *Recommendations*).

Commerce

The historic context of commerce is concerned with buying and selling of commodities transported from one place to another. Associated property types include stores, warehouses, grain elevators, and hotels. The majority of the property types are one- and two-story brick commercial buildings on a town's main street. The buildings represent architectural styles that include Italianate, Commercial Vernacular, Queen Anne, and Mediterranean Revival. Identified properties associated with commerce include grain elevators in Gordon and Clinton; a hotel in Gordon; the Pine Ridge Agency Warehouse in Rushville; and many commercial buildings in Hay Springs, Rushville, and Gordon.



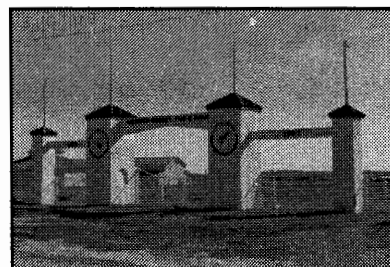
Ferd Shald Commercial Building in Gordon (SH05-017)

Two commerce-related properties are recommended as potentially eligible for the NRHP. (See *Recommendations*).

Survey of Sheridan County

Diversion

The theme of diversion relates to activities designed to relax and amuse people. Related properties identified in the reconnaissance survey include the entrance gate to the Sheridan County Fairgrounds in Gordon; the Modisett ballpark in Rushville; the Modisett Card Club in Rushville; two opera houses in Rushville; the Highland Bowling Club in Ellsworth; and the Walgren Lake State Recreation area south of Hay Springs.

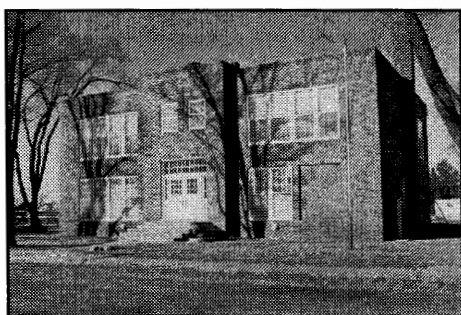


Sheridan County Fairground entrance gates in Gordon (SH05-025)

We recommend two diversion-related properties as potentially eligible for the NRHP. (See *Recommendations*).

Education

The education context relates to the processes of teaching and learning. The reconnaissance survey identified rural and urban schools and libraries as related property types. Rural schools were typically one- or two-room, frame, front-gable or hipped-roof buildings with mainly south-facing windows. Many rural schools remain, although many have undergone alterations such as replacement windows, new roofs, an exterior coat of stucco, enclosed entries, and additions.

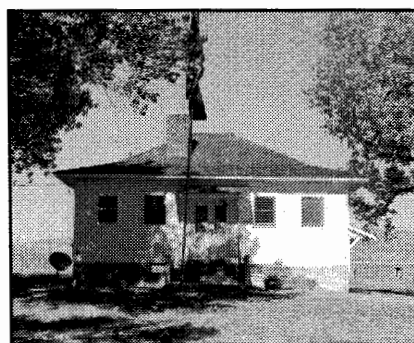


Lakeside High School (SH07-002) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

In the early twentieth century, many of the smaller communities built two-story, brick high school buildings. Today, the communities use some of them as elementary schools, while others are vacant. In the early to mid-1900s, the larger communities of Gordon, Rushville, and Hay Springs built both a high school and elementary school, which still function as schools.

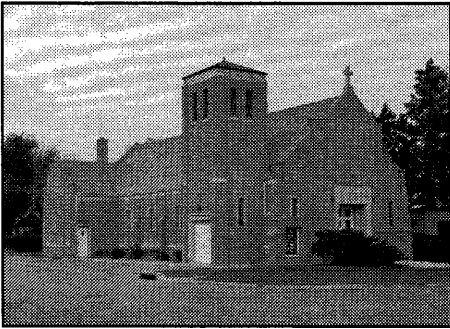
Libraries were an important feature in the larger communities of northern Sheridan County. In Rushville and Hay Springs, local benefactors provided money to construct library buildings.

We recommend five properties related to education as potentially eligible for the NRHP. (See *Recommendations*).



Ellsworth School (SH04-003) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Survey of Sheridan County



St. Paul's Evangelical Church in Rushville (SH08-028) - potentially eligible for the NRHP

Religion

The historic context of religion relates to the institutionalized belief in and practices of faith. Related property types identified during the reconnaissance survey include churches, cemeteries, parish halls, and clergy residences. Most of the churches we identified were in the urban communities, but a few were scattered throughout the rural areas. The urban churches, mostly of brick construction, were designed in the characteristic Neo-Gothic Revival style. Rural churches were most often wood frame with little ornamentation. Cemeteries were found on the outskirts of the communities and in rural areas. Some of the cemeteries displayed grottos and decorative entrance gates. Generally, religious

properties are not eligible for inclusion in the NRHP unless a property derives its primary significance from architectural distinction or historical importance.

We recommend four properties related to the historic context of religion as potentially eligible for the NRHP. (See *Recommendations*).

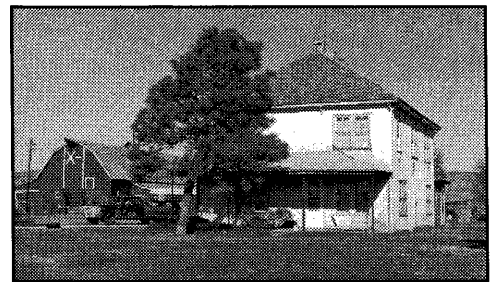
Services

The theme of services relates to properties offering support services to an area such as public utilities, health care, and banking. Related properties identified in the reconnaissance survey included banks, a water tower, and a public women's restroom.

One service-related property—the M. Rosa Corder Restroom (SH08-005) is recommended as potentially eligible for the NRHP. (See *Recommendations*).

Settlement

The historic context of settlement relates to the division, acquisition, and ownership of land. The primary property type associated with settlement is houses and includes the largest pool of buildings surveyed in Sheridan County. Because of the strong winds and harsh winters in the Panhandle, many of the homes have been covered in stucco to provide more protection to the exterior building material. Much of the stucco was added during the 1920s and 1930s. The addition of stucco was generally completed during a building's historic period and therefore does not diminish the property's integrity. The residential properties represent vernacular forms with some high style characteristics. Some of the most common found in the county include:

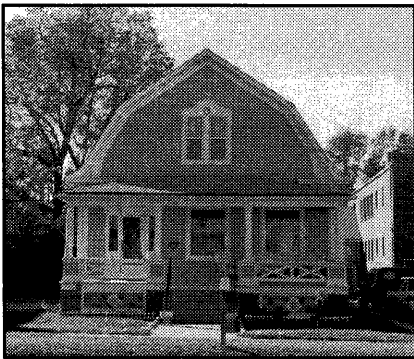


Fourteen Plus Ranch (SH00-128)

- The gabled ell is one of the most common forms identified and generally consists of a two-story "gable" and a one-story wing. Houses of this type are found on several farmsteads in Sheridan County.

Survey of Sheridan County

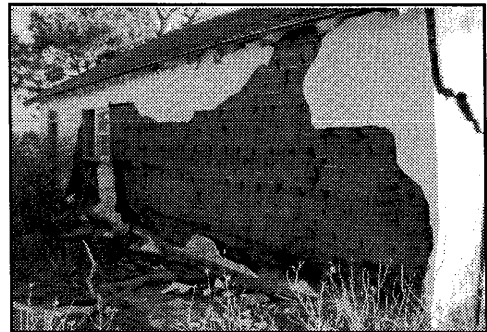
- Four-squares are generally large, two-story houses with a square plan, hipped roof, and brick, clapboard, stucco, or concrete block construction. Larger farm houses, ranch houses, and urban residences often use this form.
- The one-story cube or "Prairie Cube" is a modest version of the four-square. This type of building is usually one-story, hipped-roof, and oftentimes has a hipped-roof dormer. Many of Sheridan County's smaller farm houses, stone houses, sod houses, and baled hay houses were constructed in this form.



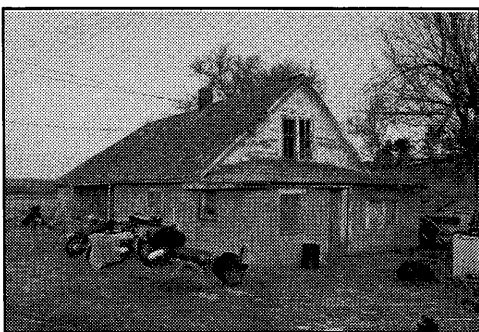
Dutch Colonial Revival style house in Gordon (SH05-011) - potentially eligible for the NRHP

- Cross-gabled houses are usually two-story, roughly square, with an intersecting gable or gambrel roof. This form is not as common as the first three.
- Double-pen log houses are found in northern Sheridan County where wood was more common. Log construction was generally used during the early settlement period. A few of these log houses remain in Sheridan County but most have been abandoned.

We identified two additional vernacular construction methods – sod and baled hay houses – in Sheridan County. Sod was an early construction method used in western Nebraska. Homesteaders often built sod houses because of the availability of materials, low construction costs, and simplicity of construction. The majority of materials were located on-site and a builder did not need to be hired. In Nebraska, some sod houses were partially "dugouts," dug back into a bank and requiring more digging and less sod construction. Sod houses were most often rectangular in form although some were L-shaped or T-shaped.



Detail of the sod bricks (SH00-086)



Shepardson Sod House (SH00-099) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Before building a sod house, homesteaders cleared the ground grasses and leveled it off. Sod was cut into 3- to 6-inch-thick, 1- to 3-foot-long ribbons and then laid grass side down, staggering the seams to form the walls. The walls were often two to three sod bricks thick, and every third or fourth layer, the bricks were laid crosswise. No mortar material was used in construction and any cracks were filled with loose soil. Overhead beams were used above window and door frames to support the sod bricks. The walls were leveled with a spade to ensure proper settling. Three roof types were used on the sod houses: gable, hip, and shed. The

Survey of Sheridan County

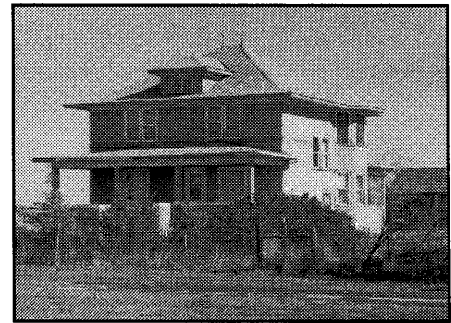


Queen Anne style house in Gordon (SH05-005)

most common form gable consisted of a ridge pole and beams to support the sod roof. Interior walls were often plastered, and ceilings were formed by the hanging of muslin or canvas. Covering the sod prevented infestation by insects and snakes. However, sod house owners still had to worry about rain entering through the roof. Exterior walls were often covered with stucco. Often, the only recognizable characteristics of a sod house from the exterior are deep window wells and doorways.¹⁵²

Sod houses, once common across the landscape of western Nebraska, are rare today; Mead & Hunt historians identified nine during the reconnaissance survey. (One sod house was 1½ stories). Unfortunately, most of the sod houses are in poor condition – many are abandoned and are rapidly deteriorating due to exposure to the elements. Other sod houses have undergone significant alterations, including additions that sometimes overshadow the original sod structure.

Similar in construction to sod houses is the one baled-hay house identified during the reconnaissance survey (SH00-106). Baled-hay houses were built in the Sand Hills from about 1910 to 1940 and use bales of hay piled as bricks. The exterior is often covered with stucco and the interior with plaster. Identifying baled-hay houses is difficult, because they have the same sod house characteristic of deep window wells and doorways due to the thickness of the walls.



Craftsman style farmhouse (SH00-066) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Vernacular architectural styles oftentimes exhibit some high style architectural characteristics. The majority of homes that exhibit them are located in the communities, although some of the larger farms and ranch houses do also. Some of the most common architectural styles featured in Sheridan County include:



H.G. Lyon Residence/Gordon Hospital (SH05-008) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

- Craftsman style bungalows, dating from the early 20th century, commonly exhibit steeply pitched roofs with exposed rafters, one and one-half stories, and brick or stucco exterior. Gordon has many Craftsman bungalows, most of which were built by local builder Glenn Conklin.
- Queen Anne houses, dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, display fish-scale shingles, decorative porches, frame construction, irregular form, turrets, and a variety of wall materials.

¹⁵² Roger L. Welsch, Sod Walls: The Story of the Nebraska Sod House (Broken Bow, Nebr.: Purcells, Inc., 1968).

Survey of Sheridan County

- Italianate characteristics are found on a variety of vernacular house forms. Details include bracketing in the eaves, wide eaves, and arched windows.
- Neoclassical Revival ornamentation is found on houses in some of the communities of Sheridan County. Most common features include Doric porch columns and symmetrical facades.



Jacobson Farmstead (SH00-133) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

During the early twentieth century, two unique builders lived in Gordon. Karl Tuchenhagen and Glenn Conklin built many homes and commercial buildings in and around Gordon, and most of them are still standing.

Karl Tuchenhagen, a native of Germany, came to the United States as a young man and homesteaded north of Gordon in 1886. Following his father, Karl became a stonemason and worked throughout northern Sheridan County. Because there was little native stone in the area, Karl used cement in molds to create stone-like concrete blocks for houses. Almost all of them built in and

around Gordon used Tuchenhagen blocks. His blocks had “K.W. Tuchenhagen” engraved on the underside. One of the more prominent general mercantile stores in Gordon, the Fair Store (SH05-010), was constructed in 1905 with blocks made from Karl’s business.

Craftsman style bungalows were built throughout Gordon during the early decades of the twentieth century. Many of them can be attributed to *Glenn Conklin* (1884-1964), a carpenter in the area. Conklin built houses and commercial buildings in Gordon. Each of his Craftsman style houses displays distinctive wood craftsmanship such as elaborate ceilings, decorative wood flooring, and moldings.

We recommend nine urban residences as potentially eligible for the NRHP and four rural properties, including a sod house, a homestead/Kinkaid Shack, and a log house. (See *Recommendations*).



Craftsman style bungalow constructed by Glenn Conklin in Gordon (SH05-039) - potentially eligible for the NRHP



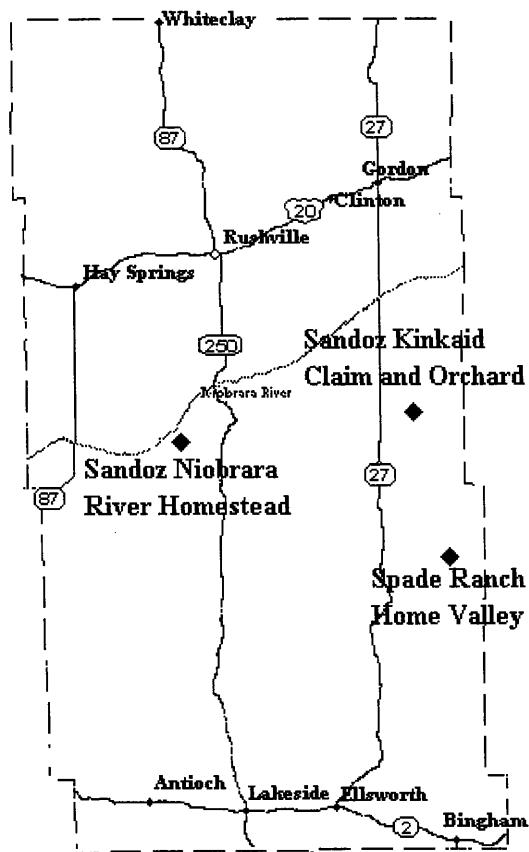
Loosveldt Bridge (SH00-043) – listed on the NRHP

Transportation

Transportation relates to the “carrying, moving, or conveying of material and people from one place to another.” Examples of associated property types include trails, roads, gas stations, bridges, railroad stations and depots, and airport terminals. The Sheridan County survey identified two gas stations, four truss bridges, and nine railroad culverts related to this theme.

We recommend one property associated with transportation as potentially eligible for the NRHP. (See *Recommendations*).

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County



Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

Mari Sandoz (1896-1966), one of Nebraska's leading authors and historians, wrote of life in the Sand Hills of western Nebraska during the presettlement, Native American, and white settlement years between 1885-1930.¹⁵³ Some critics viewed her often stark accounts of life as unrealistic, but those who lived in the area under the *Kinkaid Act* and the farmer-rancher conflicts knew that her stories depicted real life on the Nebraska Plains. Her portrayal of the Native American life of the West and western Nebraska is considered significant to the telling of the Region's history.

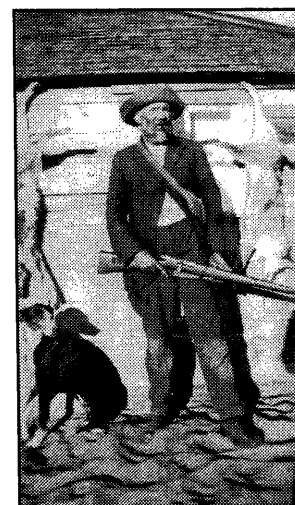
Mari's experiences growing up on the Niobrara River and in the Sand Hills of Sheridan County influenced her writing significantly. Her attachment to this land is recognized in all her works, even those set outside the region. Her father was the subject of her most famous work, *Old Jules*, and his experiences helped Mari understand the Panhandle and its earliest settlers.

Growing up in the Sand Hills

Jules Ami Sandoz, pioneer, locator, and horticulturalist, came to Nebraska in 1880 at the age of 22. He came from a prosperous family in Switzerland where he'd studied medicine for three years. However, because of an argument with his father, he left his native Switzerland and his sweetheart, Rosalie, behind, promising to send for her when he settled. Jules traveled as far as his money would take him, arriving in Nebraska in 1881. He filed for his first homestead on the Verdigre Creek in Knox County in northeast Nebraska in June of that year.¹⁵⁴ Although he had become settled, Rosalie refused to come to Nebraska to marry him. In 1883, after three years in Nebraska, he married his first wife, Estelle. He left her only 7 months later to travel to Valentine in Cherry County in 1884 for land that had just been surveyed and opened for settlement.

After obtaining maps of the newly surveyed Panhandle west of Valentine, Jules made his way to the Running Water (Niobrara River) in Sheridan County. The picturesque valley attracted him, and the dark soil along the Niobrara promised to be good farmland:

The hills gave way and before him was the silver ribbon of the Niobrara, the wooded slopes barely tinged with the palest green, topped by the yellowish sandstone bluffs.¹⁵⁵



Jules Ami "Old Jules" Sandoz
(NSHS)

¹⁵³ The majority of the biographical information regarding Mari Sandoz was taken from Helen Winter Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

¹⁵⁴ C. Barron McIntosh, "One Man's Sequential Land Alienation on the Great Plains," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (October, 1981), 439.

¹⁵⁵ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 19.

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

Although the area was a vast, unsettled land, Jules had grand ideas for it:

Jules saw his home and around him a community of his countrymen and other homeseekers, refugees from oppression and poverty, intermingled in peace and contentment."¹⁵⁶

Jules adapted quickly to the environment of the Niobrara. He lived in a dugout "soddie" and began associations with the Sioux Indians, with whom he hunted. His ties to the Sioux would last throughout his life. Although he adapted quickly, Jules' early life on the Niobrara was marred with disappointments. Rosalie, his Swiss sweetheart, still refused to come to the United States and marry him. Within his first two years on the Niobrara, he broke his leg while digging a well. After months at Fort Robinson hospital, he returned to the valley, disabled for the rest of his life:

When a man is crippled for life before he is thirty, penniless in an alien country, and persecuted by his neighbors it is no wonder if he loses certain fastidious traits and develops others of a more bitter nature."¹⁵⁷



Jules and Mary Sandoz (NSHS)

Although bitter after his accident, Jules actively located settlers on the Mirage Flats area of the Niobrara Valley, hoping to settle the area with German and Swiss immigrants. He wrote letters to friends in Switzerland encouraging them to come to Nebraska for free land. Many Swiss came to the area, including members of his family, who filed 53 claims.¹⁵⁸ He established a post office at his house and began his first orchard with experimental trees. His work as a locator and settler of the flats and his knowledge of medicine and horticulture made Jules a highly respected man. His house and post office became a gathering center for settlers who came to Jules for advice and companionship. However, he was also a stubborn man, which led to conflicts between Jules and his neighbors. Jules made enemies of the ranchers when he located people on range land, and he made enemies of neighbors when he refused to compromise over simple issues. One of Jules' enemies even killed Jules' brother Emil by shooting him in the back. Despite these conflicts, Jules was respected by most, trusted by many, and liked by some.

After his first three years on the Niobrara, Jules realized he needed a companion to help with the cooking and outdoor work. Between 1887

Only the strong and the courageous, the ingenious and the stubborn, remained.

Mari Sandoz, Old Jules, 180.

¹⁵⁶ Sandoz, Old Jules, 19.

¹⁵⁷ "Old Jules, A Biography," text for advertising Mari Sandoz's book. (Mari Sandoz Collection, University of Nebraska Archives.)

¹⁵⁸ McIntosh, "One Man's . . .," 439.

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

and 1893, he married three more times, first to Henriette who divorced him after four years, then Emelia who left after only two weeks, and finally, Mary, who became the driving force behind the success of Old Jules.

Jules Sandoz and Mary Fehr were married in 1894, and two years later their first child, Mary Susette Sandoz, was born. Although named Mary, after her mother, she was called Marie to distinguish between the two (she later changed her name to Mari). From her earliest days, Mari was influenced by her father's strong hand. He beat her when she was only six weeks old because she would not stop crying. This left a lasting imprint on the child who remained a quiet, solitary person, ever fearful of her father. Mari's early years were troublesome for her in other ways too. Physical affection was not displayed in the Sandoz house. Mari never saw her parents hug or kiss, nor was she ever shown any affection by her parents.

By the time Mari was six, two other children had joined the Sandoz family. Responsibility for her younger siblings – which by 1911 included five children – fell on Mari: "When a baby was two weeks old it was put into my bed and was then my responsibility."¹⁵⁹ By the age of ten, Mari had the responsibility of cooking, cleaning, and doing the dishes, and she could bake up a 49-pound sack of flour a week.¹⁶⁰ Because she was responsible for her siblings, she was also responsible for their actions, and Mari was punished if one of the younger children misbehaved. Her mother, Mary, was a strong, hard working woman, who expected nothing less from her children. Mary did all the outside chores, working with the cattle, the chickens, and the orchard that Jules had taken such pride in planting. Jules was an intellectual who felt he was above the hard work required on the homestead, and he relied on his wife and children to keep the farm running.¹⁶¹

When Mari was nine, she and her brother Jules Jr., were sent to school, although their father had to be forced by a truancy officer to allow them to go. Jules had a low opinion of country schools, because the terms were generally short, sometimes only a few weeks, and because the school was run by the Peters family with whom Jules had problems. School was an exciting experience for Mari, who had never been taught to read or write. Mari learned quickly and realized her ability for writing and telling stories. Although ostracized for her father's actions, her accent, and her family's poverty, Mari often wrote stories for her classmates, who envied her ability.

Jules was very intelligent, and he taught his daughter almost everything he knew about nature, paleontology, and history. His knowledge about the fossils along the Niobrara was particularly interesting to Mari, who later took courses at the university in geology and anthropology.

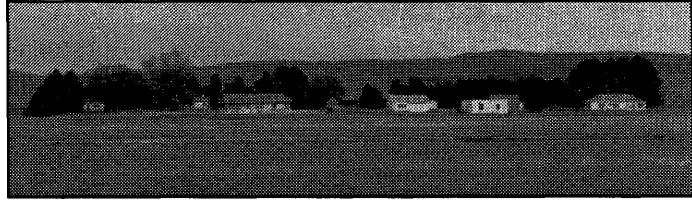
¹⁵⁹ "Autobiographical Sketch of Mari Sandoz' Early Years," in Mari Sandoz, Hostiles and Friendlies: Selected Short Writings of Mari Sandoz (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1959).

¹⁶⁰ "Autobiographical Sketch . . ."

¹⁶¹ Josephine Frisbie, "Marie Sandoz: A Product of the Sand Hills," Sunday World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands (8 September 1971).

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

The Sandoz family lived on the Niobrara claim until 1910 when Jules moved his family to a Kinkaid claim in the Sand Hills, 25 miles southeast of the Niobrara claim. Mari and Jules Jr. moved to the Kinkaid claim in the summer of that year and lived there until the family joined them in the fall.



Jules Sandoz Kinkaid Claim Complex (SH00-028) - potentially eligible for the NRHP

In the Sand Hills, Mari was more accepted by others because all the children were poor Kinkaiders. Old Jules began his second orchard in the Sand Hills, one that would become a famous site in the area. It produced bushels of fruit every year, proving to the cattlemen that something besides cattle could grow in the hills.

The move to the Sand Hills introduced Mari to a different landscape of Sheridan County. She was introduced to important men – including ranchers for the Spade, Springlake, and Modisett ranches – and to Kinkaiders as well, all of whom had different stories to tell. She witnessed, firsthand, the problems between the ranchers and the Kinkaiders. These problems would be the basis for short stories and books that she would write later in life.

In 1913, Mari finished her schooling while living at the Sand Hills place, and as a show of independence she went into Rushville and obtained her third-grade teaching license so she could teach at the rural county schools. Over the next few years, Mari taught at several schools throughout Sheridan County. In 1914, at the age of 18, she married Wray Macumber, a local Kinkaider. After only five years she divorced him because of “mental cruelty” and he did not contest it.¹⁶² Her divorce brought a turning point in her life and she left the Sand Hills for Lincoln School of Commerce where she learned typing, shorthand, and spelling. After a brief return to the Sand Hills in 1921, Mari returned to Lincoln to pursue her education.

In 1922, Mari began her college education, where she discovered a stronger desire to write. Because she had not graduated from high school, the University of Nebraska initially refused to enroll her. But she persisted, and in the summer of 1922 entered the Teacher's College at the university. During the summer break of 1923, she returned to western Nebraska to teach near Sidney, then left to teach at the Hunzicher school near her home. That fall she enrolled in the university, taking courses geared toward writing.

¹⁶² “Mari Sandoz was Married during Teens to Rancher,” Lincoln Star (16 September 1971).

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

Transition to Writer

Mari was first introduced to the wonders of books and writing when she started school at the age of nine. Although she spoke little English and did not know how to read or write, she learned quickly. After that she read all her father's pamphlets and newspapers, she borrowed books from neighbors. Retired schoolteachers provided her with the classics – Shakespeare, Hawthorne, Conrad, and Hardy – and widows provided her with lighter fiction. She preferred the classics because she felt the others were too thin and artificial.¹⁶³ However, Jules thought reading novels and fiction was strictly for the hired help and every time he caught Mari with a book, she was punished. Punishment only created a stronger desire to read, and she smuggled books to her room and hid them in her mattress where no one would discover them.

Reading was not the only subject that fascinated Mari. She also began writing almost immediately after she was taught. At the age of 12, Mari entered her story, *The Broken Promise*, in a contest sponsored by the *Omaha Daily News*. Although the story did not win, the newspaper printed it in 1908. When Jules found out, he was furious and he punished her by putting her in a cellar. But the thrill of seeing her name in print was too great, and she continued to send in her stories using a pen name.

Mari's best story ideas came from listening to her father's friends, who often visited. At night, she would quietly sit on the woodbox behind the stove, listening to the stories of the Indians, gold seekers, settlers, and immigrants. During hunting trips with her father, Mari learned the most. She noted his stories of settlement, Indians, and the land, and she would use them to help tell her own story of the settlement history of Sheridan County.

In the fall of 1923, Mari returned to school in Lincoln where she remained for the next 17 years. This time, she was determined to succeed as a writer. But her first attempts at publishing failed. Between 1924 and 1925, magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harper's*, and the *Atlantic Monthly* rejected several of her short stories. She did see a few successes, though, winning honorable mention in *Harper's*

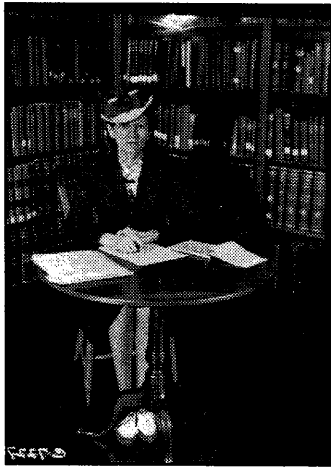
intercollegiate short story contest with *Fearbitten*. Six other short stories and articles were published between 1924 and 1928. In 1929, Mari hired an agent, June Margaret Christie, to help sell her works. However, Mari became frustrated with Christie's criticism and fired her in 1930. She would not hire another agent until *Old Jules* was published.

I lived in a story-teller region--all the old traders, the old French trappers, all the old characters who had been around the Black Hills . . . told grand stories of their travels and experiences in the early days of the Missouri and around Fort Laramie." "But the most impressive stories were those told me by Old Jules himself . . ."

Mari Sandoz, Old Jules, "Foreward."

¹⁶³ "Autobiographical Sketch . . ."

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County



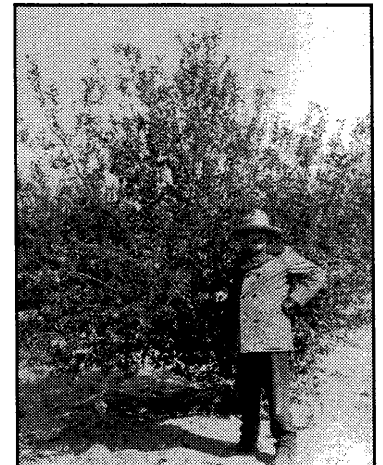
Mari Sandoz (NSHS)

In 1928, Mari returned to the Sand Hills to help nurse her dying father. The fear she felt as a child turned into respect as an adult. On Jules' deathbed in 1928, although he considered writers and artists "the maggots of society,"¹⁶⁴ he asked Mari to "write of his struggles as a locator, builder of communities, bringer of fruit to the Panhandle."¹⁶⁵ Although she had often thought of her father as the subject of a book, she could never write the story because of his negative opinion of writers. Her father's request now allowed Mari to write her most famous book, *Old Jules*.

From 1928 to 1932, Mari spent most of her time writing her father's biography. Because of a few successes with her short stories, she'd become a full-time writer, quitting all of her part-time jobs. She spent her time researching extensively, trusting no one's memory, not even her own. When the Depression hit at the end of 1929, Mari was greatly affected. Living in Lincoln was expensive. She had very little to eat and sometimes suffered from malnutrition.

Because of her poverty and her frustration with *Old Jules*, she returned to the Sand Hills briefly during 1930 and studied the Native Americans of the area. This would provide her a subject for later works. In 1931 she returned to Lincoln to take a part-time job at the Nebraska State Historical Society as a researcher for Addison E. Sheldon, the director. After years of writing, she finished *Old Jules*. In 1932 she sent the book to 14 publishers, including the *Atlantic Press* for its nonfiction contest, and all 14 rejected it. The rejections devastated her. She took all 85 of her completed manuscripts, including *Old Jules*, and burned them.¹⁶⁶ She returned to the Sand Hills, vowing never to write again. But within the first month of her return, she broke her vow and began working on her first novel, *Slogum House*.

A New Deal work program at the State Historical Society brought Mari back to Lincoln in 1934. She spent the remainder of the Depression working for the Society and spent her spare time writing short stories, rewriting *Old Jules*, working on *Slogum House*, and attempting to publish her works. Two years had passed since *Atlantic Press* had rejected *Old Jules*. In 1935 she resubmitted the book to the publisher's nonfiction contest. This time,



Old Jules in his orchard - early twentieth century (NSHS)

¹⁶⁴ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 419.

¹⁶⁵ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, "Foreword."

¹⁶⁶ "Autobiographical Sketch . . ."

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

her book won the contest and Mari received a \$5,000 prize. This was the first major success of her career. Within the first two months of printing, 85,000 copies of *Old Jules* were sold.¹⁶⁷

One year after *Old Jules*, her first novel, *Slogum House* was published. Other works to follow included *Capital City* in 1939, *Crazy Horse* in 1942, and *The Tom-Walker* in 1947. In all, 22 of Mari Sandoz's works were published. The key to her success was her diligent pursuit of historical facts through research and interviews.¹⁶⁸ After obtaining information, she transcribed it onto three- by five-inch index cards and cross-referenced all the information.¹⁶⁹

Mari remained in Lincoln until 1939, when she moved to Denver to work on Native American research. In 1943, after the publication of *Crazy Horse*, she moved to New York City to be close to her publishers and the eastern archives of Western history. She lived in an apartment in Greenwich Village. Although Mari expected to spend only a few years in New York, she would spend the remainder of her life in the east. But she never forgot her roots – she always returned several months of the year to the Sand Hills, and her New York apartment was decorated with items reminding her of home:

The first thing I hung on my wall in Greenwich Village was my Cowboy hat . . .but hanging it seemed a sort of commitment to stay in New York for a few months, and a reminder, in moments of anger and disgust with the east, that there was another country and another people.¹⁷⁰

Mari's death in 1966 from cancer was crushing to her friends and family, who saw Mari as one of the strongest people they knew. She left behind an unfinished story of the Sand Hills, the last in her Great Plains series. After her death she was returned to the Sand Hills that she'd left so long before. Mari is buried on a hill near Old Jules' last home, in a spot she herself had chosen. In 1962 Mari said:

I should like to be buried on the Old Jules place in the Sand Hills . . .where anyone can come and sit awhile, as the old Sioux used to come to the river place to throw their minds back, as they said . . .¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ "Mari Sandoz Heritage," Fall 1996, Vol. 15, No. 2. Newsletter of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Center.

¹⁶⁸ Helen Winter Stauffer, "Mari Sandoz and Western Biography," in L.L. Lee and Merrill Lewis, eds. *Women, Women Writers, and the West* (Troy, New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1980), 57.

¹⁶⁹ Susan Pierce, ed. *Perspectives: Women in Nebraska History* (Lincoln, Nebr.: Nebraska Department of Education and the Nebraska State Council for the Social Studies, 1984), 188.

¹⁷⁰ Sandoz, "Outpost in New York" in *Sandhill Sundays*, 139.

¹⁷¹ Caroline Sandoz Pifer, *Making of an Author: Mari Sandoz, Book 1* (Gordon, Nebr.: Gordon Journal, Publishers, 1972), 6.

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

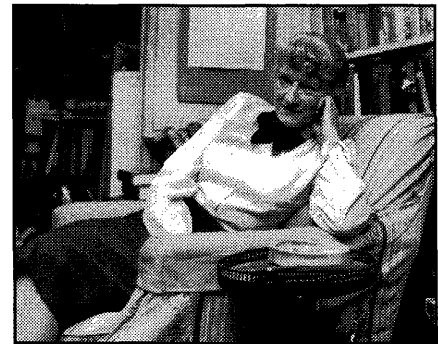
She died as she had lived, with spunk and grit and a determination to leave behind a blunt, accurate, and caring record of the region she so loved.

"The Life of Mari Sandoz," pamphlet of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society.

Even at her death Mari never forgot the state from where she'd come. In her will, she left most of her research material to the University of Nebraska. She felt far too much information was kept in the repositories of the East, too far away from their original location. She also left

money to the Short Story Fellowship for the *Prairie Schooner*, a magazine that had published her early writings.

Because of her contributions to Nebraska history and literature, Mari received several awards over her lifetime. She was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Literature from the University of Nebraska (1950) and the Distinguished Achievement Award of the Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska (1954). Four of her books were named to Chicago Corrals' list of the 100 best books about the West (1954). The Nebraska Library Association established a Mari Sandoz Award, given every year to a person who has made a significant contribution to Nebraska literature. A bust of Mari Sandoz stands in the State Capitol rotunda along with those of other important Nebraskans.



Mari Sandoz (NSHS)

Marriage of Writings to Western Nebraska

From her first short stories, Mari Sandoz' writings were tied to western Nebraska. She based all her characters and locations on familiar people and places and on stories she'd heard as a child. While Mari was still living in the Sand Hills, she vowed that "some day she would be gone from flour-sack underwear, men's shoes; be teaching, have a winter coat, never come back."¹⁷² Although she would never wear flour-sack underwear or men's shoes again, Mari always came back to her home in the Sand Hills of western Nebraska. Through her writing she also brought others to the vast unknown area of western Nebraska.

In all her works, the landscape is important and even listed as a character in *Old Jules*. To help people understand the setting of her writings, Mari often included maps in her books and offered vivid descriptions of the landscape.¹⁷³ The land was her tie to history, and a common theme in all her books is the relationship of humans to the landscape. She points out that people shaped the land, but

¹⁷² Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 382.

¹⁷³ Stauffer, "Mari Sandoz and Western Biography," 58.

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

the land also shaped the people.¹⁷⁴ Mari's father had first introduced her to the people and places of her books, and she tried to provide readers with that biographical insight:

Old Jules is the biography of my father, Jules Ami Sandoz: I have also tried in a large sense to make it the biography of a community, the upper Niobrara country in western Nebraska.¹⁷⁵

When Mari's first book, *Old Jules*, was published in 1935, readers – particularly those from the East – did not understand that western Nebraska was still largely unsettled. Mari's subject of the early twentieth century Nebraska frontier was virtually unknown to them. She attempted to bring the land and history to her readers and to introduce them to "her" Nebraska. Through her Great Plains series, Mari told the story of western Nebraska and the West from its earliest days to the white man's settlement. Chronologically, her Great Plains Series includes:

- *The Beaver Men: Spearheads of Empire*
- *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas*
- *The Buffalo Hunters: The Story of the Hide Men*
- *Cheyenne Autumn*
- *Old Jules*
- *The Cattlemen: From the Rio Grande Across the Far Marias*

She had researched a seventh and final book but never got a chance to write it.

Three of her major works, *Old Jules*, *Crazy Horse*, and *Cheyenne Autumn*, were biographies of important people in the setting of western Nebraska. Although written over a period of 18 years, the three books consistently show the author's aesthetic treatment of historical facts and her moral values.¹⁷⁶ Through her diligent research and personal experiences, Mari was able to bring the past to her readers. Many historians unfamiliar with the Great Plains question the historical accuracy of her works, because she used exclusive research material such as personal interviews. However, as Helen Stauffer said in *Women, Writers, and the West*, "it is the very uniqueness of her sources and the fidelity to the material she alone had that are the bases for the integrity of her writing."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Pierce, 192.

¹⁷⁵ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, "Foreword."

¹⁷⁶ Stauffer, "Mari Sandoz and Western Biography," 57.

¹⁷⁷ Stauffer, "Mari Sandoz and Western Biography," 59-60.

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

Intensive Survey – Properties Associated with Mari Sandoz's Life and Writings

The survey of Sheridan County included an intensive survey component to identify properties associated with the life and writings of one of the county's most respected residents, Mari Sandoz. The landscape, environment, and people of Sheridan County greatly influenced Mari as she grew up. Her writings consistently describe events, people, and the landscape of this region. Even after leaving Sheridan County, she returned for visits and continued to use this distinctive environment as a setting for her books and short stories. The NSHS placed a historical marker at the entrance to the Sandoz Ranch (on U.S. Highway 27), Mari's second childhood home, to commemorate her life and writings.

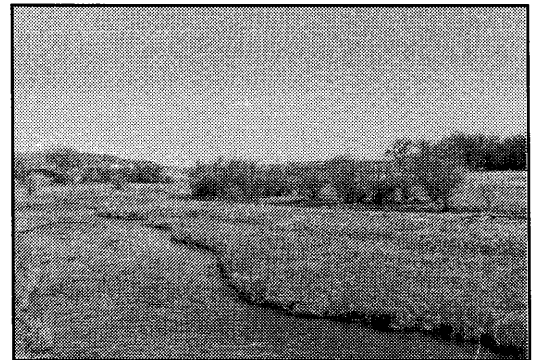
This is the country of Mari Sandoz – historian, novelist, teacher – who brought its history and its people to life in her many books, articles and stories . . . Mari Sandoz was internationally known as a chronicler of the West and an expert on Indian history. Her own aim was to understand all of life by understanding this one part of it: how man shaped the Plains country, and how it shaped him . . . She presented the drama of man on the Great Plains more completely, accurately and vividly than anyone before her had done.

Inscription on Nebraska State Historical Society Marker

The intensive survey identified five properties and cultural landscapes related to Mari Sandoz's life and included in her writings. Identified properties and landscape features were assessed for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility using the National Park Service's NRHP Criteria for Evaluation and guidelines for evaluating the integrity of a property. A discussion of NRHP Criteria and integrity is included in *Survey of Sheridan County*.

Niobrara River Homestead (SH00-137)

In 1885 Jules Sandoz located a homestead on the east bank of the Niobrara River south of Hay Springs. The Niobrara River Homestead plays an important role in many of Mari Sandoz's short stories, her novels about the Sioux, and her father's biography, *Old Jules*, is almost entirely set there. Indian Hill, Jules' first orchard, and the river itself were important "characters" in *Old Jules* and other books. The house in which Jules and Mary Fehr raised six children is no longer standing, but the landscape may include a few trees from the first orchard. Indian Hill and the Niobrara River still provide the backdrop in this beautiful setting for the homestead of Old Jules.



Niobrara River Homestead (SH00-137) - potentially eligible for the NRHP

The Niobrara River Homestead site may be eligible for listing on the NRHP as possessing historic and cultural value applying *Criterion B* and *Criterion Consideration C* for its association with Mari Sandoz as her birthplace and childhood home until the age of 14. *Criteria Consideration C* states:

... a birthplace or grave of a historical figure is eligible if the person is of outstanding importance and if there is no other appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life."

Historic Overview of Sheridan County

By 1897, the Mirage Flats Irrigation Company completed 22 miles of irrigation canal, and 12 miles of ditch were under construction.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, many farmers had already left the area. The need for water was somewhat decreased by the return of average rainfall in 1896 and 1897, as Jules Sandoz had predicted by following rain charts for the state.

And when the flumes were done and the ditch had swallowed over a hundred thousand dollars, it irrigated a little over a hundred thousand acres . . . The people of the lower Flats put in years of labor and got nothing.
Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 254.

The corporation continued to construct laterals to expand the irrigated area but was burdened financially by the upkeep of the flumes. By 1916, one of the flumes had collapsed and another had been destroyed in a prairie fire. Under financial distress, the company disbanded and dissolved in 1916.⁵⁷

Agriculture: The Early to Mid-20th Century

*Twenty-two years brought many changes to the land of promise into which Jules drove so confidently in '84. By 1906 the Indians along the Niobrara, the big game – elk, deer, even antelope – were gone. The winters were still cold, but now there were railroads, good houses, fuel, warm clothing, better roads.*⁵⁸



Sheridan County Sand Hills residents - early twentieth century (LL)

Settlement acts, such as the *Kinkaid Act*, continued to entice new settlers to western Nebraska. By 1920, Sheridan County's population reached 9,625. The composition of the county remained largely rural as the county was home to 1,063 farms. The average farm size in Sheridan County was 1,260 acres, which contrasted with the average farm size of 339.4 acres for the rest of the state.⁵⁹ The much larger size of farms in Sheridan County is accounted for by the fact that ranches are included as farms in the statistics.

⁵⁶ Clapp and Dewing, 8.

⁵⁷ Clapp and Dewing, 10-12.

⁵⁸ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 277.

⁵⁹ *Fifteenth Census of the United States-Agriculture*, 1930 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1932).

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

Since Mari lived at the Sandoz Kinkaid Claim for only three years, the Niobrara River Homestead site is the most closely associated with her life in Sheridan County and her writings. The homestead may pre-date her years as an author, but it was her father's stories about daily life and her experiences at the homestead that provided the subject for her writings. Therefore, the Niobrara River Homestead is the most important site related to Mari Sandoz in Sheridan County.

Although no structures of the homestead are extant, the site still retains integrity. It includes viewsheds undisturbed by modern intrusions, and the only sign of human intervention is a c. 1900 pony truss bridge on the narrow winding road. The Niobrara River Homestead site may be an area as large as a quarter section (40 acres) encompassing the valley of the homestead, viewsheds and setting of the homestead, and Indian Hill.

The site may also be potentially eligible for its association with Jules Sandoz as the location of his initial experimentation station for growing fruit trees in the Sand Hills. His experiments here contributed to the success of his orchards on the Kinkaid Claim. Further research into Jules Sandoz's specific contributions to regional horticulture would be necessary to determine if this site or the Sandoz Kinkaid Claim and orchard is the property that best represents his achievements.

In many of Mari Sandoz's works she refers to Indian Hill, located at the northern edge of the property, as a "Sioux Camp site." As a result, the site needs further evaluation for archaeological remains to determine if it may also be eligible under *Criterion D*.

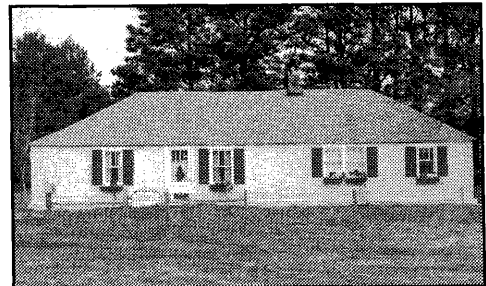
Jules Sandoz Kinkaid Claim and Orchard in the Sand Hills (SH00-028)

In 1910, Old Jules Sandoz filed a Kinkaid Claim in the Sand Hills. Located between the large Springlake and Spade Ranches, this would be his and his wife Mary's last home. Mari and her younger brother, James, settled at the site, and the family joined them a few months later. On this claim Jules began his last two orchards for which he received honors from the Nebraska Horticulture Society. His portrait hangs in the Agriculture Hall of Fame in Lincoln.



*Approach to Sandoz Kinkaid Claim
(SH00-028)*

Several buildings and landscape features associated with this property remain, including the original house and store, barn, chicken coop, outhouse, bunkhouse, corral, and two orchards. The original house (c. 1910), as described in *Old Jules*, "...was a business of lean-tos that the Kinkaiders found highly amusing."¹⁷⁸ Jules' later modifications and additions (c. 1920) turned it into a simple one-story rectangular ranch house. The moderately pitched, hipped

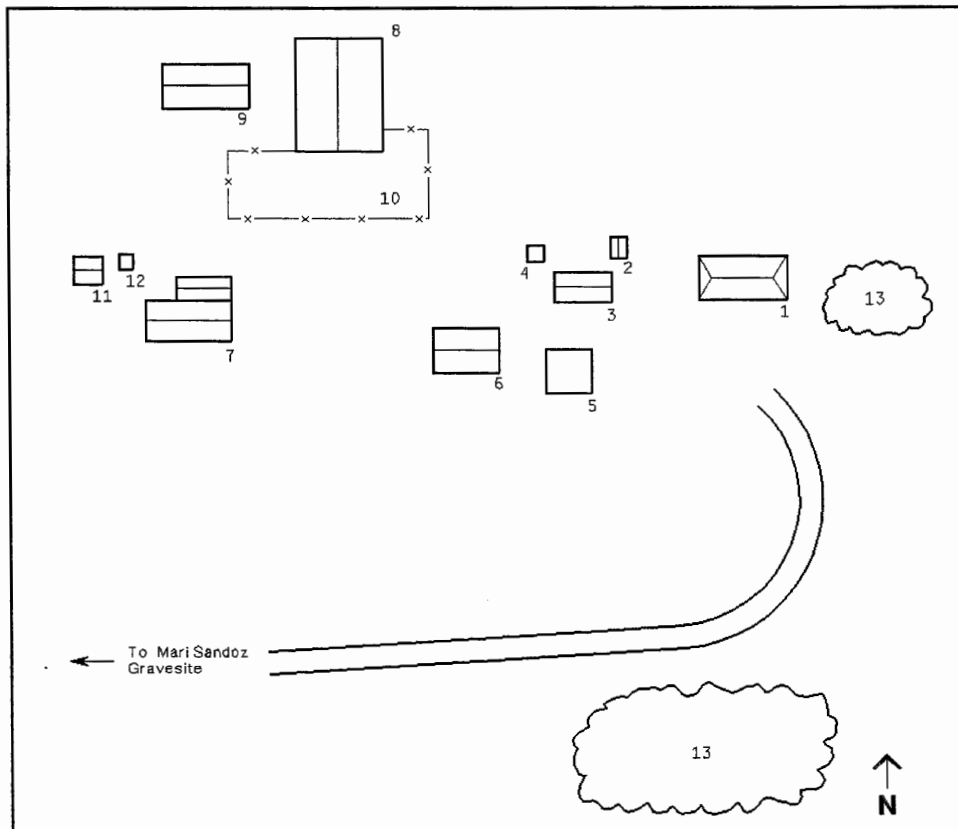


Jules Sandoz House and Store (SH00-028)

¹⁷⁸ Sandoz, *Old Jules*, 357.

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

roof has almost no overhang, and a single brick chimney protrudes from its center. Original windows are three-over-one, double-hung sash and are ornamented by modern shutters and window boxes. The main facade faces south and is asymmetrical. The interior of the house is modest. Initially, the east end of the building was both the house and store. Over time, Jules constructed several additions that resulted in the larger living quarters at the west end of the house and the smaller store on the east end. In later years, this was converted into a kitchen and small bedroom.



Sandoz Kinkaid Claim and Orchard (SH00-028) - not to scale

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Jules Sandoz House and Store | 8. Barn |
| 2. Chicken Coop | 9. Cattle Shed |
| 3. Bunkhouse | 10. Corral |
| 4. Outhouse | 11. Shed |
| 5. Canning Shed | 12. Cellar |
| 6. Garage | 13. Orchard |
| 7. Modern House | |

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

Although changes have been made to the house—including new stucco and the addition of shutters and window boxes—the house retains its overall form, design, and integrity. To the west of the house are four outbuildings, including a bunkhouse, chicken coop, garage, and outhouse. The bunkhouse, moved to its location from a site beyond the southern hill of the complex, was constructed of log with wood sheathing. Modern windows have been added to the building. The chicken coop, outhouse, and garage are utilitarian wood frame with clapboard siding. South of the original house is a concrete block canning shed used to can the fruit from the orchard. The building is utilitarian in design with a flat roof and no ornamentation.

A modern house is also located west of the original house. This building is a one-story c. 1950s ranch style house. A cellar and shed are located to the rear of this house. Immediately north of the modern house are a barn and cattle shed with corrals. The barn is a modest two-story, gable-roof barn with three bays. The cattle shed is a one-story, gable-roof building. All of the corrals consist of round wood posts and wood boards.

The complex also includes three orchards Jules planted and the grave of his daughter, Mari Sandoz. The orchards are becoming somewhat overgrown and some only contain a few trees. Some of the remaining trees are still producing fruit. These orchards are an important feature of the landscape around Old Jules' homestead.

Before her death of cancer in 1966, Mari Sandoz asked to be buried on the hill overlooking Old Jules' last home and orchard. A simple granite monument marks her burial site.

We evaluated the Sandoz complex as a cultural landscape potentially eligible as a rural historic district. Cultural landscapes are defined as a geographic area, including both natural and cultural resources, that have been influenced by or reflect human activity or was the background for an event or person significant in human history. Sandoz's experiments in fruit growing resulted in his recognition by the Horticulture Society of Nebraska and the development of fruit growing in the Sand Hills.



Historic view of orchard at Jules Sandoz's Place - early twentieth century (NSHS)

Although the complex includes the addition of a nonhistoric ranch house and a bunkhouse that has lost its historic integrity, the complex is recommended as potentially eligible for the NRHP. Mari's grave dating to 1966, which is only 32 years old, is considered to be a contributing resource of the cultural landscape. The property is potentially eligible under *Criterion B* for its association with Jules Sandoz, an important figure in the development of agriculture in Sheridan County.

We recommend that preliminary boundaries for this rural historic district would include the property historically

Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

associated with Jules Sandoz's orchard operation. The landscape district may include 300 to 600 acres of land to encompass the complex of buildings, remnants of three orchards, Mari's gravesite, pastures, and viewsheds of the surrounding Sand Hills.

Peters' School (SH00-013)

At the age of nine, Mari was sent to school where she learned how to read and write. The school, known as the Peters' School, was two miles southwest of the river place. Although Jules did not like the Peters family, a truancy officer forced him to send his children to the school. The Peters' School played an important role in Mari's development as a writer. While she attended, she learned she had a gift for writing, and her first story was published by the *Omaha Daily News*.



Peters' School (SH00-013)

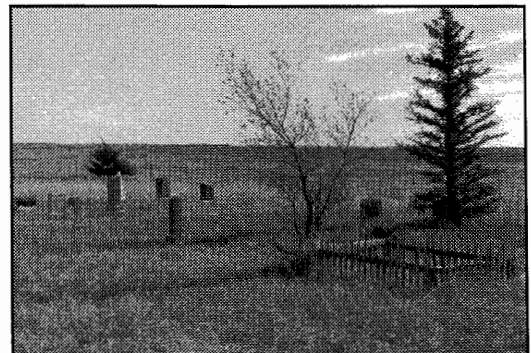
The building is a one-story hall plan school with a gable roof. An enclosed gabled entry is found on the east end. Most of the windows on the south facade are boarded over. The only decorative feature is a wooden diamond shape in the east facade's gable end. The school building is vacant and has severely deteriorated. The west (rear) wall is missing, and the wood clapboard is beginning to deteriorate. Although it is associated with Mari Sandoz, the school is not related to her primary significance and does not retain sufficient integrity to recommend listing on the NRHP.

Hunzicher Sod House (SH00-029)

In 1922, Mari Sandoz returned to the Sand Hills to teach one term at the Hunzicher School. She boarded at the Hunzicher Sod House, a one-story, hipped-roof building with a hipped-roof dormer.¹⁷⁹ Now used for storage, the building is severely deteriorated and displays several alterations, including boarding of openings and a missing window in the dormer. Although the house is associated with Mari Sandoz and displays a rare construction method, this property lacks historic integrity and we do not recommend it for listing on the NRHP.

Swiss-Beguin Cemetery (SH00-095)

During the intensive survey, we identified the Swiss-Beguin Cemetery where members of the Sandoz family are buried. The small cemetery is located a few miles east of the Niobrara River Homestead site. In *Old Jules*, Mari writes about the death of her Uncle Emile, who was killed in an argument over land. A gunman reportedly hired by a neighbor murdered Emile in front of his family, and Emile is buried in this cemetery.



Swiss-Beguin Cemetery (SH00-095)

¹⁷⁹ Stauffer, Mari Sandoz, 45.

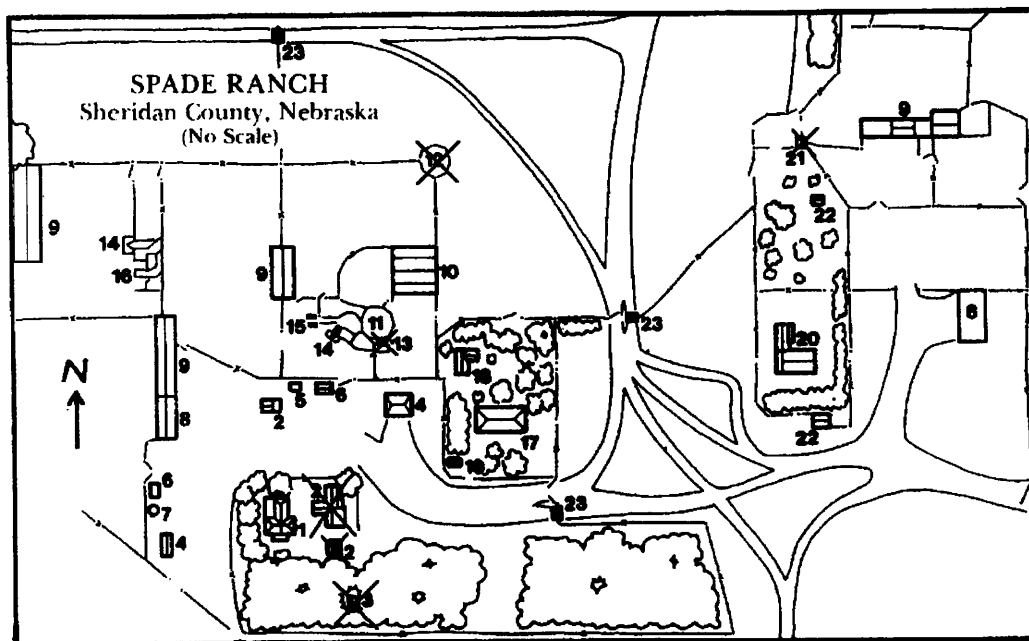
Mari Sandoz's Sheridan County

Cemeteries are generally considered ineligible for the NRHP unless they achieve significance for: their relative great age; distinctive design; association with significant events; or containing the graves of persons of transcendent importance. The Swiss-Beguin Cemetery does not meet these NRHP criteria exceptions and the cemetery is recommended as ineligible for listing.

Well Site

The well site, where Old Jules Sandoz was injured in a well accident during his first year in Sheridan County, is identified by a marble marker. One of the first stories told by Mari in *Old Jules* is one about two men who jokingly tugged on a rope that frayed and sent Jules to the bottom of a well. He broke his leg and spent eight months in Fort Robinson recovering. After his return he located a homestead further east along the Niobrara. We do not recommend the well site as eligible for the NRHP, because the event is not significant in the life of Mari Sandoz, and there are no standing resources to denote the site.

The Spade Ranch



1. Log Cookhouse
2. Bunkhouse
3. Outhouse
4. Garage
5. Chicken Coop
6. Granary

7. Grain Bin
8. Machine Shop
9. Calving Shed
10. Barn
11. Sorting Pen
12. Breaking Pen

13. Scale
14. Loading Chute
15. Branding, Dehorning,
Castrating Pen
16. Roping Chute
17. Comstock-Bixby House

18. Guest House
19. Well House
20. Peterson House
21. Windmill
22. Shed
23. Cattle Guard

(Map adapted from 1980 National Register Nomination. Nonextant buildings have been crossed out).

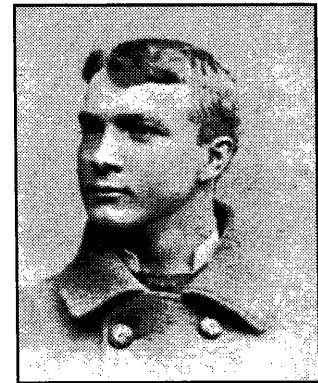
The Spade Ranch

One of the larger ranching operations in the Nebraska Sand Hills, the Spade Ranch, encompassed land in both Sheridan and Cherry Counties. Founder Bartlett Richards and partner William Comstock successfully managed the ranch into the early twentieth century. During the growth of the ranch, the climate was right for ranching, with open-range grazing and ready markets for cattle. Under the ownership of Richards and Comstock, the Spade Ranch grew to about a half-million acres. However, the dynasty of the Spade Ranch came to an end when the federal government began to indict cattlemen for illegally fencing government land and fraudulent use of land claims.

Following the foreclosure of the Spade in the 1920s, a young Lawrence Bixby harvested hay on the land for the bank and then worked for Brass and Meyers who were renting the land. Eventually, with small purchases and hard work, Bixby came to own much of the original Spade Ranch. In addition to reviving the ranch, Bixby also restored the Richards House in Ellsworth. The legacy of the Spade Ranch continues today through the descendants of the Bixby family.

Bartlett Richards

Bartlett Richards was born January 6, 1862, in Weathersfield, Vermont, the son of a Congregational Church pastor. At the age of ten, after his father passed away, Richards was sent to Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. After graduation, Richards moved west to Cheyenne, Wyoming, in August 1879 for a period of rest in the outdoors.¹⁸⁰



A young Bartlett Richards (SC)

Richards quickly became involved with ranching activities in the West. By 1881 he was managing three ranches in Wyoming and a year later was put in charge of the Lakotah and Rocky Mountain Cattle Companies. In 1883, representing Abram S. Hewitt, Richards took over the Bronson Ranch, renamed the Lower 33, in Sioux County, Nebraska.¹⁸¹

In 1885, Richard's brother DeForest moved west to open a bank in the boom town of Chadron, Nebraska, which had just been reached by the Fremont, Elkhorn, and Missouri Valley Railroad. Bartlett was named vice president of the bank and in 1887 became president of Chadron's First National Bank. Richards was also involved with at least nine other banks in Nebraska and Wyoming, serving as stockholder, vice president, and president. Although involved in banking activities, Richards continued to operate his Lower 33 and Ox Yoke Ranches in Nebraska and manage the Lakotah Company. By 1900, Richards had the largest cattle holdings in Nebraska, including the Spade Ranch empire.¹⁸² For his achievements, Bartlett Richards was named to the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City in 1970.

¹⁸⁰ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 3.

¹⁸¹ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 3 and 41.

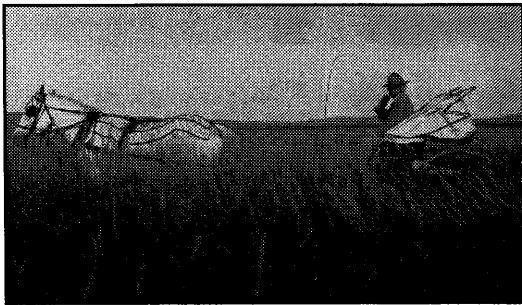
¹⁸² Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 41 and 50-53.

The Spade Ranch

Spade Ranch and the Settlement of Western Nebraska

On August 10, 1888, Richards bought Bennett Irwin's ranch near Bean Soup Lake in Sheridan County and named it the Spade. The log house from the Newman N Bar Ranch was disassembled and moved to its new location at the Spade Ranch. Richards also purchased Nellie Overton's homestead on the headwaters of the Snake River.

Richards needed funds to develop his ranch and partnered with John J. Cairnes of Oelrichs, South Dakota (30 miles north of Chadron), forming the Richards and Cairnes Cattle Company. In the mid-to-late 1880s, William Comstock purchased the C Bar Ranch on Gordon Creek, near the Spade, and



William Comstock (SG)

formed a partnership with Bartlett Richards as Richards and Comstock. Little is known about the background of Bartlett Richards's partner William Comstock, a Montana rancher and member of the Montana Stock Growers Association since 1886.¹⁸³ Richards and Comstock owned three different ranches – the Spade, the C Bar, and the Overton – under the corporate name of the Spade Ranch.¹⁸⁴

During the 1890s, Richards developed his almost 800 square miles in Sheridan and Cherry Counties into manageable units: "This meant fencing, drilling wells, constructing reservoirs, erecting windmills, developing hay meadows, building quarters for his workers, cutting wagon trails through the Sand Hills, stringing telephone lines, and a multitude of other tasks."¹⁸⁵ Small natural lakes and two or three windmills supplemented the 56 wells at well sites.¹⁸⁶

Ranching activities occurred year round. Following the breeding schedule, spring was calving season. In the days of open-range ranching, before fencing of many pastures, spring also included the round-up. Summer activities included harvesting hay to use for cattle feed in the fall and winter. Additional laborers were often hired to help with this task. During the fall, many of the ranches plowed fireguards to prevent fires from spreading, as the pastures had dried by the summer. Plowing fireguards was an annual event, because moisture in the winter and spring would allow grass to grow over the ditches each year, causing the fireguards to be ineffective.

During the fall, cattle were shipped by railroad to markets in Omaha and Chicago, or to corn farms in the Midwest. Winter activities included feeding cattle the hay put up in the summer. Year-round activities included providing beef for the Indian agencies and building fences. Initially, fences created

¹⁸³ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 59 and 78.

¹⁸⁴ Telephone interview with Bret Bixby, grandson of Lawrence Bixby, 27 March 1998.

¹⁸⁵ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 68.

¹⁸⁶ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 80-81.

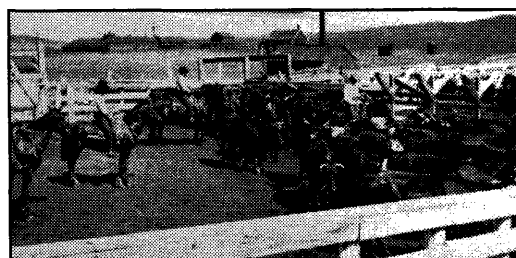
The Spade Ranch

corrals at the ranch headquarters. By the early 1890s, fencing of grazing areas increased. The number of widespread roundups in the area may have increased the desire to fence in areas.¹⁸⁷

The Spade Ranch was one of the larger operations near the Pine Ridge Agency and supplied beef to the Dakota reservations. The *Chadron Advocate* reported in 1891, "Bartlett Richards has received the beef contract at Pine Ridge Agency for the ensuing year. The amount is 6,000,000 pounds. This will require 6,000 head of cattle."¹⁸⁸ The Spade continued a contract with the Pine Ridge Agency until 1896. Even though the agency provided good business, most of the steady business came from shipping cattle to packers or feeders in the corn belt.¹⁸⁹

In December 1895, the Richards and Cairnes partnership was formed with assets totaling \$475,000. Richards and Cairnes, Inc., included Richards as president, Cairnes as vice president, and Jarvis Richards, secretary and treasurer. John Cairnes only attended one board meeting and in 1899 sold his stock to Richards and resigned. William Comstock took Cairnes' place on the board, and they remained partners until Richards' death in 1911.¹⁹⁰

As early as the 1880s, Richards established the Spade Ranch's cattle shipping point in Ellsworth, southwest of the Spade Ranch. In 1898, Richards and Cairnes, Inc., built a store, hotel, and stockyards in the small community. The store served as the headquarters for the Spade Ranch and included a general supply store and post office. The hotel, built across the street from the store, provided free accommodations for the Spade Ranch cowboys.



Ellsworth Stockyards - early twentieth century (SG)

In May 1899, the two companies – Richards and Cairnes, Inc., and Richards and Comstock – merged to form the Nebraska Land and Feeding Company. Bartlett Richards, Will Comstock, Jarvis Richards, DeForest Richards, and E.C. Harris of Chadron were named as directors.¹⁹¹ At the time of the merger, the company range included 16,000 head of cattle. Bankers authorized loans of \$150,000 to purchase additional cattle.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sandhills*, 165.

¹⁸⁸ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 68.

¹⁸⁹ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 71.

¹⁹⁰ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 74 and 78.

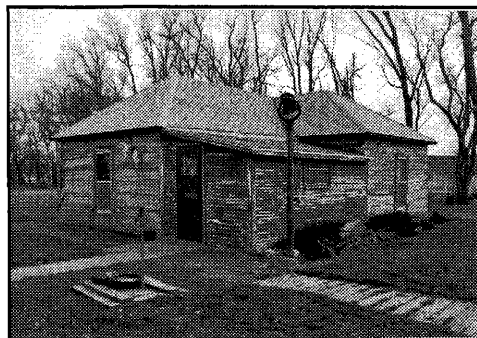
¹⁹¹ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 97.

¹⁹² Brinda Beel, ed., *A Sandhill Century*, Vol. Nos. 1 and 2 (Valentine, Nebr.: Cherry County Centennial Committee, 1985), 10.

The Spade Ranch

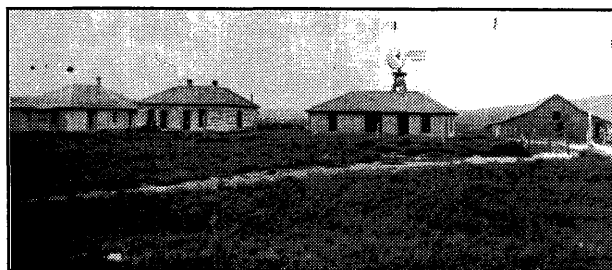
William Comstock stayed in the home valley of the Spade, which is approximately 25 miles from Ellsworth. Comstock had a sod house at the Home Ranch, another soddie as the ranch office, a good-sized bunkhouse, the cookhouse (the log building moved from the Newman Ranch), a barn, feed yards, large corrals for working with cattle, breaking horses, branding and dipping cattle, a blacksmith shop, a machine shop, and the ranch store. The ranch store featured staple groceries, clothing, supplies, and a place to pick up mail carried from the Ellsworth post office.¹⁹³ Later Comstock

built a larger frame house in the center of Spade operations. One additional house was built as a home for a hay boss, Arnold Peterson. Peterson worked for the Spade for several years, but rather than work for a wage, he received both land and stock.



Log cookhouse moved from the Newman Ranch (SG)

During the Nebraska Land and Feeding Company years, Richards provided financial backing for the partnership while Comstock ran the ranch. Although Comstock stayed at the ranch, he seldom associated with his cowhands. Instead, two men were hired as a Hay Boss and Cow Boss. These men would act as managers, doing the hiring and firing and running the day-to-day operations. Comstock made sure things were running smoothly and the ranch was financially stable.¹⁹⁴



The Spade Ranch complex, c. 1888 (SG)

By January 1899 telephone lines were constructed from Gordon to Ellsworth, and lines were proposed to extend to Rushville, Hay Springs, and Chadron under the new "Ranch Telephone Company."¹⁹⁵ The Ranch Telephone Company was incorporated with Richards as president.

Telephone lines connected the cattle-shipping points on the Burlington Railroad – Ellsworth, Lakeside, and Bingham – with Comstock's headquarters at the Spade.

Richards moved his headquarters from Chadron to Ellsworth in 1901 to be closer to the ranch.¹⁹⁶ He completed his brick house in Ellsworth in the summer of 1902. The Richards family had a winter residence built at Coronado in San Diego, California, that same year.

¹⁹³ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 82.

¹⁹⁴ Information was obtained from author's interview with Brett Bixby.

¹⁹⁵ Rushville Standard 20 January 1899.

¹⁹⁶ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 93.

The Spade Ranch

Richards began to concentrate on upgrading the breeding operation. He experimented with grain feeds to take care of calves and other special feeding problems, and he put in windmills for adequate water.¹⁹⁷ Richards and Comstock were the first cattlemen in the area to use chloro-naphtholeum, a livestock dip that removed lice, mange, Texas itch, and other external parasites. The Spade Ranch was the agent for this patented product west of the Mississippi River. In 1903, the Spade's Herefords won the Grand Prize at the American Royal Stock Show in Kansas City for the best of any breed in both yearling and calf competition.¹⁹⁸

In 1901 Richards had 400 sections of land surveyed north of Ellsworth and placed a four-wire fence around the quarter million acres. This area included government land with 30 reservoirs, each of which had two or three windmills and water tanks for the stock.¹⁹⁹ The fencing of pastures was necessary to prevent scattering of cattle and preserve breeding. To protect grazing lands from settlers, some ranches, such as the Spade, filed 160-acre homesteads where they had built fences. For example, the Spade Ranch hired Civil War veterans, their widows, and others to make the claims and then transfer the leases to the Spade. This method allowed ranches to protect ranges and buy time in the hope that a leasing law would be passed. The first batch of Civil War widows filed for the Spade Ranch in July 1902, and by early August of 1902 enough widow claims had been added to cover the western side of Richard's southern pasture.²⁰⁰



The fence gang at the Spade - early twentieth century (SG)

The Fencing Trials – Historical Role of the Spade Ranch

In general, cattlemen did not feel that fencing was wrong. They believed they were fencing land unsuitable for any other uses, especially farming. Further, they believed a method of leasing land was a way to give value to the government land in the Sand Hills and allow fencing to be legal. The House Committee on Public Lands held hearings on leasing and grazing legislation between January and June 1902.

¹⁹⁷ Mari Sandoz's notes in the file "Spade Ranch," Mari Sandoz Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives.

¹⁹⁸ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 73 and 118.

¹⁹⁹ Yost, 207.

²⁰⁰ McIntosh, The Nebraska Sandhills, 208.

The Spade Ranch

Richards testified in favor of the Bowersock Bill, making the following plea:²⁰¹

Here the United States has immense properties that are not improving, which we [cattlemen] have grown up with and have improved, and we ask you that while you have no better use for this land, that you will lease it to us at a reasonable rental, and that the moment you have any better use for it, for irrigation, for mineral entries, for storage reservoirs, for agricultural purposes, for forest reserves, for anything else which may come up and be the sense of Congress that it wants, that land shall be lifted out of the lease, and no recompense shall be made to the former leaseholder.

– Hearings before the committee on public lands, 1902.²⁰²

Congress hesitated to pass a leasing act, and the Department of the Interior was determined to remove the fences. By November 1902, the *Rushville Standard* reported that Bartlett Richards had been ordered to remove his fences in Sheridan and Cherry Counties. The fences enclosed about 60 townships, which would be enough land to support 960 families at two sections per family.²⁰³ The Secretary of the Interior, Ethan A. Hitchcock, following the Roosevelt administration's direction, set out to enforce the 1885 Van Wyck Law, which forbade fencing of the public domain.²⁰⁴

The first Nebraska fencing case was brought to trial in Omaha in May 1905 against John and Herman Krause, ranchers of Box Butte and Sheridan Counties. The Krause brothers were found guilty and sentenced to a fine of \$1,300 and half the court costs, and spent 24 hours in the custody of a U.S. Marshal. Their appeal for a new trial was denied. Richards attended the trial of the Krauses. Soon after, Reverend George C. Ware, president of the UBI Ranch in Hooker and Thomas Counties, was convicted and fined \$1,000 and one year in Douglas County jail. Even though cattlemen had been indicted and found guilty, U.S. District Attorney Baxter was still willing to allow the cattlemen to remove their fences and many were given a reasonable amount of time to do so.²⁰⁵

In 1905, Richards and Comstock were indicted and brought to trial for the illegal fencing of 212,000 acres of government land. They first entered a plea of not guilty, but quickly reconsidered and plead guilty to "asserting ownership and exclusive occupancy of government lands."²⁰⁶ Attorney Richard S. Hall told the court as the plea was entered for his clients: "It is our intention to comply

²⁰¹ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 104-106.

²⁰² Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 108.

²⁰³ Mari Sandoz's notes in the file "Spade Ranch."

²⁰⁴ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 140.

²⁰⁵ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 141-142.

²⁰⁶ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 145.

The Spade Ranch

with the law. We are removing the fences as rapidly as we can, but such as may remain, we have nothing to do with. Wherever the government shows us we have an unlawful fence, we will remove it."²⁰⁷ The fences they had "nothing to do with" may refer to those on a common boundary with other ranches or on widow claims.

On November 13, 1905, Richards and Comstock were sentenced to the custody of a U.S. Marshal for six hours and a fine of \$300 and half of the court costs. The modest sentence may have reflected a finding that they did not intimidate settlers and that their employees were at work removing the fences. Controversially, newspaper accounts charged that Richards and Comstock took part in a victory celebration instead of serving their time. The Secretary of the Interior was upset about this news and fired District Attorney Baxter and Marshal Thomas L. Mathews, the officer in charge of Richards and Comstock's six-hour sentence. In reality, during their sentence, Richards and Comstock returned to the hotel to pack, write letters, shop, eat dinner, and arrive at the train station for the 11:00 p.m. train to Ellsworth.²⁰⁸



Spade Cowboys - early twentieth century (SG)

In August 1906, new charges were brought against all the Spade officials for "conspiracy to defraud the government of the title and use of public land, subornation of perjury, and conspiracy to suborn perjury."²⁰⁹ The case was called to trial on November 12, 1906, in the Federal District Court in Omaha before Judge William H. Munger. Richards and Comstock did not testify. Secret service men spent 13 months investigating and getting evidence. Affidavits were taken from 600 witnesses, subpoenas were issued for 165 witnesses, and 132 people offered evidence in trial.²¹⁰

The jury reached a guilty verdict on 35 of the 38-count indictment on December 20, 1906. A motion for a new trial was overruled and the sentence for Richards and Comstock was \$1,500 fines and one year in prison. Other Spade officials, Jameson and Triplett, received lesser sentences of \$500 in fines and eight months in prison. Richards and Comstock appealed the verdict and were released on a \$5,000 bond. The appellate court affirmed the guilty verdict on December 3, 1909. On October 17, 1910, the Supreme Court declined to hear the appeals of Richards, Comstock, and their associates, and ordered them to pay the fines and prepare to serve their sentences beginning on December 7.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 145.

²⁰⁸ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 145-147.

²⁰⁹ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 169.

²¹⁰ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 168 and Mari Sandoz's notes.

²¹¹ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 172-175 and 191.

The Spade Ranch

Comstock, Jameson, and Triplett surrendered in late November and Richards arrived in Omaha on December 7, 1910. All four were transferred to the Adams County jail in Hastings to serve their sentences. Again the press covered the story of their imprisonment with false accounts. It was reported that Richards and Comstock were receiving special treatment but, in reality, the two were in the same surroundings as other prisoners and were granted very few privileges.

In June 1911 Richards was allowed to go to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, for gallstone surgery and returned to the Hastings jail on August 10. Richards had long-standing intestinal troubles and never fully recovered from surgery. He passed away in jail on September 4, 1911. After his death, Comstock appealed and was discharged from jail 22 days early to attend the funeral of his business partner in San Diego.²¹²

The trials and appeals had caused a financial strain on the ranch and holdings of the Nebraska Land Company. Before his imprisonment, Richards had been ill and had not directly managed the ranch. During his imprisonment, there was no direct supervision of ranch affairs. Following Richard's death, Comstock took control of the Spade Ranch, and the Comstock and Richards families shared quarters at the Ellsworth house in the summers. In 1912, Comstock closed the Bar C and Overton Ranches, reducing the official land holding of the Spade Ranch. William Comstock died of cancer in the fall of 1916. Despite Comstock's advice to the contrary, Mrs. Richards kept control of the ranch.²¹³

It was difficult to maintain the ranch, because the era of free range land was over. By 1916, Kinkaiders had patented the area in the middle of the Spade range. Range land, once free, now had to be leased or bought from the homesteaders. The Nebraska Land and Feeding Company borrowed \$200,000 from the New York Trust Company through a first mortgage on the Spade land. The ranch survived until the depression of 1922-1923, during which time the mortgages on the land were foreclosed. By this time, the holdings of the Spade Ranch had been reduced to about 60,000 acres.²¹⁴ The Richards family spent their last summer in Ellsworth in 1923 and the ranch was turned over to the bank.

The Legacy of the Spade Ranch – Lawrence Bixby

Lawrence Bixby first stepped foot on the Spade Ranch in 1903 at the age of eight and grew up observing and working for its owners. Bixby's mother, Jennie, was the ranch cook and his father, James, was a school teacher. In 1924, after foreclosure on the ranch, the banks hired Lawrence Bixby to put up the hay on the Spade lands.

²¹² Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 214-215 and 220-221.

²¹³ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 225.

²¹⁴ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 226-227; and Beel, 31.

The Spade Ranch

E.M. Brass and his partner, Edward P. Meyers, of the Sandhills Land and Cattle Company leased the Spade land after the bank foreclosure. Brass and Meyers arranged with Lawrence to buy the hay and have him care for and feed their cattle. Early on, Brass assisted Bixby with a \$2,000 loan down payment to buy 2,000 acres of Spade land.²¹⁵ Starting in the 1920s, Bixby slowly began to obtain sections of the old Spade Ranch by hard work and perseverance, aided by bankers willing to take a chance. At one point, he was able to purchase a piece of range land with \$5 down and a note of \$1,300. Occasionally, land would be sold back to meet bank notes, but through the years, Bixby was able to regain 40 sections of the original Spade Ranch, including the home valley.²¹⁶ After, the death of James Bixby in 1922, the operations came under the name Mrs. J.H. Bixby and Sons.

Around 1926, Brass and Meyers suggested Bixby move to the ranch headquarters in the home valley. Lawrence Bixby married Eleanor Riordan on May 23, 1927. They had two sons, Lawrence and James. E.M. Brass died in 1929, leaving Meyers in full control of the Sandhills corporation. During the depression of the 1930s, Meyers reduced the company's total number of cattle. Bixby's 13-year relationship with the Sandhills Corporation ended in 1937.²¹⁷

Bixby continued to purchase land and the operation eventually amassed much of the holdings that had comprised 60,000 acres of Richards' and Comstock's Spade Ranch. During his ownership, Bixby planted thousands of trees in the home valley around the Spade Ranch and installed airstrips for the ranch planes. In addition to reviving the Spade Ranch, Lawrence Bixby also returned the Richards House in Ellsworth to noteworthy status. Since the time of the Richards ownership, the house had been divided into apartments and was in disrepair. In 1953-1954, Lawrence and Eleanor moved to the Ellsworth house after its rehabilitation.²¹⁸



Lawrence Bixby (SG)

Today, ownership of the ranch is shared by three descendants of Lawrence Bixby. Most of the original buildings in the "home valley" of the Spade Ranch are extant and still functioning in their original capacity. The only exception is the log cookhouse, which was rehabilitated for use as a residence. Ranching operations have changed considerably since the days of Richards and Comstock. Large numbers of cowboys are no longer hired by the family. Generally, one hired hand is found on ranches in the area. Because of the efficiency of transportation by trucks, large round-ups and cattle

²¹⁵ Ruth Van Ackeren and Robert M. Howard, Lawrence Bixby: Preserver of the Old Spade Ranch (Nebraska National Trails Museum Foundation, 1996, 2nd edition), 59 and 65.

²¹⁶ Janet Jeffries Spencer, "Spade Ranch," National Register Nomination, 1980.

²¹⁷ Van Ackeren and Howard, 66 and 99-100.

²¹⁸ Beel, 55 and Van Ackeren and Howard, 117.

The Spade Ranch

drives are no longer needed. Instead, the trucks are brought directly to the ranches where the cattle are loaded and then shipped to market.

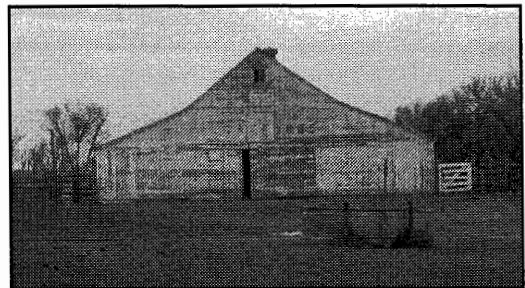


Lawrence Bixby's sons – Jim and Larry – on their way to school (SG)

Although some ranches surrounding the Spade have been sold, the Spade Ranch continues to operate as a beef cattle ranch. Richards and Comstock's legacy was carried on by Lawrence Bixby, whose legacy was carried on by his wife and grandchildren. Historically, the Spade Ranch was an important feature of the landscape of Sheridan County, and it continues to be one today.

Intensive Survey of the Spade Ranch and Related Resources

The significance of the Spade Ranch to Sheridan County's history and ranching in the state of Nebraska is undeniable. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1980, the NRHP nomination boundaries of the Spade Ranch encompass the "Home Valley" of 3,840 acres and more than 23 buildings. Since its listing, few changes have been made to the ranch, and the property retains its NRHP eligibility.²¹⁹ A NSHS marker in Ellsworth commemorates the Spade Ranch and its legacy.



Spade Barn (SH00-030) – listed on the NRHP

A goal of the NeHBS survey of Sheridan County was to identify and evaluate additional properties associated with the operation of the Spade Ranch and its original and subsequent owners – Bartlett Richards, William Comstock, and Lawrence Bixby. In addition to the ranch itself, Mead & Hunt identified other resources related to the history of the Spade Ranch, and either resurveyed or surveyed these buildings for inclusion in the NeHBS Inventory. Identified properties and landscape features were assessed for NRHP eligibility using the National Park Service's NRHP Criteria for Evaluation and guidelines for evaluating the integrity of a property. A discussion of NRHP Criteria and integrity is included in *Survey of Sheridan County*.

Richards/Bixby House in Ellsworth (SH04-001)

Bartlett Richards built this house in the summer of 1902 to be closer to the Spade Ranch. George W. Clark, general contractor from Alliance, completed the construction of the U-shaped house, which featured a roofed porch running along the inside of the U. Originally, 11 doors opened into an interior courtyard. In 1904, the house was sided with brick fired in Hemingford. The house was

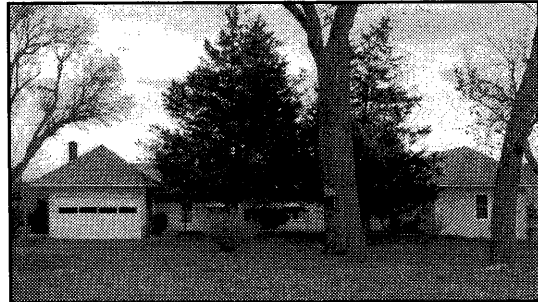
²¹⁹ Two bunkhouses, an outhouse, one breaking pen, a scale, and a windmill were recently removed. Their removal does not affect the overall integrity of the property.

The Spade Ranch

primarily a summer home, as the Richards family had a winter home built at Coronado in San Diego, California, in 1902. A visitor once remarked about the house's several bathrooms, "I never saw a house with so many dipping vats."²²⁰

Following the death of Bartlett Richards in 1911, the Richards and Comstock families spent summers together in the Ellsworth house. The summer of 1923 was the last summer the Richards family spent in Ellsworth, and William Seebohm, manager of the Spade Store after 1908, occupied the house from 1923 until 1928. Over the years, the house was divided into apartments and had various residents. In the 1950s, Lawrence Bixby, owner of the Spade Ranch, purchased the Richards House and renovated it for his residence. The house remains in the Bixby family.

Today, the house retains its original U-shape layout, but the distinctive porch on the inside of the U was removed, which altered the property's historic appearance. Originally of frame construction, the house was covered with brick in 1904 and at a later date a stucco exterior was applied. The application of stucco to buildings is common within the Sand Hills and does not diminish a property's historic integrity. Other significant alterations to the exterior of the house include replacement of entryways with windows, the introduction of picture windows, and the addition of a modern garage door opening on the main elevation. Some of the original interior courtyard doorways have been replaced with windows.



Richards/Bixby House (SH04-001) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

We evaluated the Richards/Bixby House for NRHP eligibility applying *Criterion B* for its association with Bartlett Richards. Bartlett Richards constructed the house in 1902 and used it as a summer residence for his family while he attended activities of the Spade Ranch. After his death in 1911, his family and the Comstock family used the property until 1923 when it was turned over to the bank.

The residence retains its original U-shaped footprint, but the historic appearance has been altered with the removal of the characteristic wrap-around porch, the introduction of a garage door on the main facade, and the alteration of the buildings fenestration with the conversion of door openings to windows and the introduction of picture windows. Many of the building's changes date to the 1950s when Lawrence Bixby purchased the renovated property. Therefore, the property no longer retains the historic appearance related to the period of its original owner, Bartlett Richards.

We evaluated the Richards/Bixby House for the NRHP applying *Criterion A* for its association with the Spade Ranch. For a property to be eligible under *Criterion A* it must be associated with a pattern of events and the property's specific association must be considered important. The house, used by Richards as his local residence after 1902, but its specific association seems to relate more to Richards

²²⁰ Beel, 31.

The Spade Ranch

than to the ranch. The Home Valley of the ranch (listed on the NRHP) and the Spade Store (recommended for the NRHP) tell more about the day-to-day operations of the ranch. Therefore we recommend that the Richards/Bixby house does not meet NRHP *Criterion A* for its association with the Spade Ranch.

Lastly, we evaluated the Richards/Bixby House for the NRHP applying *Criterion B* for its association with Lawrence Bixby. Bixby is locally and regionally significant for returning the Spade Ranch into a successful ranching operation and maintaining its facilities. Following the revitalization of the Spade Ranch, Bixby purchased the Richards House in 1953-54 and renovated it. He resided at the Ellsworth residence until he passed away in 1982.

Only two properties—the Spade Ranch and the Richards/Bixby House—are extant properties related to Lawrence Bixby and his contributions. The Spade Ranch NRHP nomination does not recognize Bixby's contributions to the revitalization of the ranch. The ranch was listed in 1980 for its significance to the agricultural history and settlement of the Great Plains Region of the United States and its association with its first owners, Richards and Comstock.

Therefore, the Richards/Bixby House is the best remaining example of a property associated with Lawrence Bixby. The property represents his association with revitalization of the Spade Ranch and demonstrates his contributions to local ranching. Although his direct association with the house began in 1953, his significant contributions to the Spade Ranch pre-date this period. Therefore, even though the substantial rehabilitation of the house is not quite 50 years old, we recommend that the property be listed applying *Criterion Consideration G: Properties that have achieved significance within the past fifty years* as the best property to represent his life and significant contributions of Lawrence Bixby.

Spade Store in Ellsworth (SH04-002)

In the 1880s, Ellsworth, located on the Burlington Railroad line, offered only a depot, school, and section house. Richards and Comstock located the headquarters of the Nebraska Land and Feeding Company in Ellsworth, which served as the shipping and commercial center for activities of the Spade Ranch. In about 1898 the company erected a store, a hotel, and stockyards. The store building, built by W.T. Merritt, served as headquarters for the Spade Ranch, a general supply store, and a post office. At the height of the Spade Ranch operations, a six-team wagon made trips from the Ellsworth Store to the ranch store every three days. The wagon would bring supplies and mail to the ranch.²²¹



Spade Store in Ellsworth (SH04-002) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

²²¹ Interview with Bret Bixby.

The Spade Ranch

In 1927, after the foreclosure of the ranch, the store building was sold to Abbott Interest who hired Lawrence Graham to assume its management. Between 1928 and 1950, Lawrence and his wife, Hazel, operated the store, living in the apartment above. During this time, gasoline pumps were added. In 1950, Lawrence and Hazel Graham purchased the store from Abbott Interest. After Lawrence's death in 1960, Hazel and her son, Roy, continued to operate the store until 1967. The store remained vacant from 1967 until 1971, when it was sold to Veldon Morgan for use as a horse grooming business.²²² Today, the store is operated by Veldon's son, Wade, who sells recreational supplies. The Ellsworth post office remains in the store. The only change in use is the gasoline station.

The store is vernacular in design and contains no ornamentation. Its main section is a two-story building with a gable roof. To the north of the main section is a single-story gable roof addition, and to the south is a small one-story lean-to addition. A flat-roofed overhang was added to the lean-to addition to shelter the gasoline pumps. A single-story porch runs the width of the two gable-roof sections. Although the second-story windows have been replaced, the storefront windows are extant and retain their original configuration. Like most older buildings in the county, the exterior of the store has been covered in stucco.

We evaluated the Spade Store for the NRHP under *Criterion A* for its association with the Spade Ranch and under *Criterion C: Architecture*. Because of its relatively simple design, the store is ineligible under *Criterion C*. However, the store is potentially eligible for the NRHP under *Criterion A* for its association with the Spade Ranch and regional commercial activities. The store played a definitive role in the ranching operations, because it served as the Spade Ranch Headquarters. Also, a six-horse wagon made daily trips from the store to the ranch carrying goods and mail. The store's overall form and configuration has not been altered. Its interior retains the wood floor, overall floor plan, and the original safe from Richards and Comstock's operation. Currently, the store is the only remaining commercial building in Ellsworth. Only minor changes have been made to the exterior, including the addition of stucco (most likely completed within the historic period) and replacement of the second-story windows. Therefore, the store building retains sufficient integrity to be considered eligible for the NRHP.

Spade School (SH00-033)

The Spade School is a one-room schoolhouse about two miles from the headquarters of the Spade Ranch. The original sod school was replaced with the present structure. The original



Historic view of the Spade School - early twentieth century (NeSHPO)

²²² Interview with Stephanie Graham, 1 April 1998.

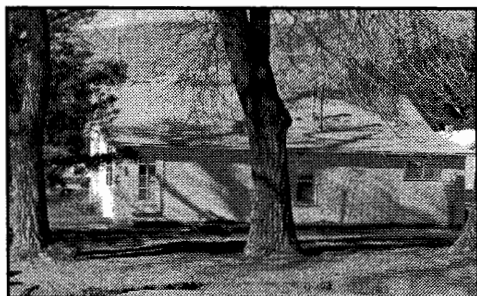
The Spade Ranch

appearance of the school was a rectangular plan, frame building with horizontal clapboard siding, hipped roof, and a bank of five four-over-four windows on the south facade.

The building remains in use as a school, but alterations have changed its historic appearance. Alterations include an addition on the west side of the building and an enclosed entry that may have been completed within the historic period. More modern additions include replacement of windows and application of vertical wood siding. A mobile home is attached to the east elevation, providing living quarters for the teacher. Since the building does not retain its historic appearance, it does not qualify for the NRHP.

Spade Ranch Store and Post Office (SH00-127)

Originally located on the Spade Ranch, this building served as a general store and post office. The store, constructed before 1899, not only served the needs of the ranchers working on the Spade Ranch, but also provided goods and services for other ranches and the later homesteaders. The ranch store featured staple groceries, overalls, nails, and other supplies and a place to pick up mail carried from the Ellsworth post office.²²³ In 1908, the Spade Ranch Store became an official post office.



Spade Ranch Store and Post Office (SH00-127)

The building was moved to its present location in the 1930s and has been converted to a residence. Interestingly, the original post office door with the mail slot remains. Alterations to the building include a small shed roof addition on the west elevation of the building, enclosure of the front porch, application of stucco, and

addition of modern windows. Since the building has been moved from its original site and undergone significant alterations, it is not recommended as individually eligible for the NRHP.

Wilcox Farmstead at Walters Lake (SH00-129)

In 1900 Charles and Anna Malone moved to Walter's Lake to provide a halfway point for ranchers and hired hands of the Spade Ranch traveling between the ranch and Ellsworth. They chose this spot because the lake provided water for the cattle. In 1905, the Spade Ranch hired Dan and Anna Wilcox to take over the responsibilities of the Malones. About three years later, Dan Wilcox homesteaded the Walter's Lake home area and continued as a Spade employee.

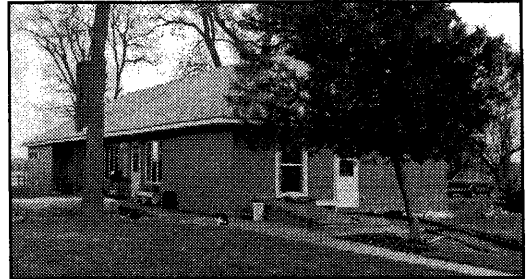
Remnants of the Wilcox Farmstead at Walter's Lake – the main house and barn – are abandoned and are in a deteriorated condition. The house is rectangular with a gable roof, and some windows and doors have been removed. The gable barn has deteriorated and is beginning to collapse. Although the Wilcox Farmstead was an important stopping point for activities of the Spade Ranch, the property does not retain sufficient historic integrity to be eligible for the NRHP.

²²³ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 82.

The Spade Ranch

Fireguards

The Spade Ranch hired two fireguard crews to construct fireguards, ditches in the ground that protected hay fields and ranches from prairie fires. The crews plowed parallel fireguards four furrows wide and 20 to 30 feet apart completely around the Spade Ranch. The furrows crisscrossed at proper intervals to burn off the grass between them. The crews typically worked digging fireguards once the area was dry, from early August to October – an annual task because the grass would regrow in the furrows each year. The crews often plowed fireguards on the section lines between major ranches.²²⁴ Remnants of fireguards, abandoned decades ago, can be found in several sections of land in Township 24 North and Range 42 West. The fireguard remnants are a landscape feature that are unlikely to be individually eligible. However, the fireguards could be a contributing element of a larger historic landscape.



William Comstock/Bixby House (SH00-030) – listed on the NRHP



Spade "Home Valley," (SH00-030), c. 1960 (NeSHPO) – listed on the NRHP

²²⁴ Richards, Jr. and Van Ackeren, 81.

Recommendations

Recommendations

Future Survey Needs

The NeHBS of Sheridan County identified historic topics and resource types that would benefit from further study. We recommend the following topics as priorities for future research and survey efforts to help interpret Sheridan County's unique history for local residents, the NSHS, and interested historians.

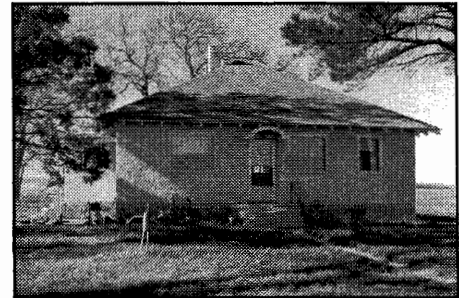
Intensive Survey of Mirage Flats Irrigation District

The Mirage Flats Irrigation District project (SH00-065), completed by the WPA, significantly boosted the agricultural production and economy in part of Sheridan County. The reconnaissance survey identified and documented the district headquarters. In addition, our research indicated that four farmstead units were constructed.

We recommend an intensive survey of the Mirage Flats Irrigation District project to identify if any of these units remain and if any additional resources are related to the project. Oral histories would also benefit locals and researchers in learning how the project was developed and the effects that irrigation has had on western Sheridan County.

Intensive Survey of Sod Houses and Baled Hay Houses

We identified nine sod houses and one baled hay house during the reconnaissance survey of Sheridan County. These resources represent a rare property type and their integrity is severely threatened. Most of the sod houses are vacant and deteriorating because they are no longer maintained. Since the construction method is not always readily apparent, we identified most of the sod houses and the baled hay house with the assistance of local residents.



Baled Hay House (SH00-106)

Due to the threatened nature of this resource type and the difficulty of identification, we recommend that an intensive survey be conducted to locate and document all of Sheridan County's extant sod and baled hay houses. An intensive survey would also provide a context for and assist in assessment of National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility of this property type.

Intensive Survey of Ranches

Ranches are an important property type in Sheridan County, and we recommend an intensive survey of property types related to the ranching industry. Ranching practices and related property types continue to change. An understanding of the county's ranching history would be enhanced through the continued documentation of related property types, including buildings, structures, and landscape features. An intensive survey would identify patterns of development, construction methods, building types, and ranching practices. The survey would provide a historic context within which to evaluate these important property types. A Multiple Property document nominating ranches and related resources in Sheridan County could result from the intensive survey.

Recommendations

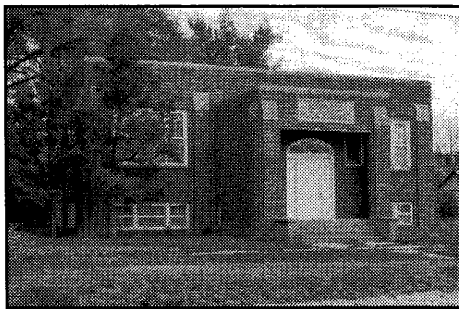
Intensive Survey of Properties Constructed by Gordon's Local Builders

We identified two local builders in Gordon that constructed many of the community's homes and commercial buildings. Karl Tuchenhausen, a stonemason by trade, used cement in molds to create stone-like concrete blocks for construction. His work is believed to be found throughout Sheridan County. Using another construction method, Glenn Conklin was a local carpenter for houses and commercial buildings in Gordon. Conklin is known to have constructed Craftsman style houses in Gordon, including two almost identical houses only a block apart (SH05-037 and SH05-039). An intensive survey of the background and construction methods of these two builders would help to identify additional properties in Gordon and Sheridan County that can be attributed to them. A Multiple Property document nominating identified properties built by Tuchenhausen and Conklin could result from the intensive survey.

National Register of Historic Places Listing Priorities

One purpose of the NeHBS of Sheridan County is to identify properties potentially eligible for the NRHP. NRHP-listing is an honorific status bestowed on properties that possess historic or architectural significance at the local, state, or national level. Six properties in Sheridan County have been listed on the NRHP:

- Antioch Potash Plants (SH00-001, SH00-002, and SH00-003)
- Colclesser Bridge (SH00-042)
- Gourley's Opera House in Rushville (SH08-015)
- Loosveldt Bridge (SH00-043)
- Sheridan County Courthouse in Rushville (SH08-001)
- Spade Ranch (SH00-030)



*Rushville Public Library (SH08-017) –
determined eligible for the NRHP*

Six properties in Sheridan County have been previously determined eligible for the NRHP by the NeSHPO. Nominations could be prepared to officially list these eligible properties:

- Masonic Temple in Rushville (SH08-016)
- Rushville Public Library (SH08-017)
- Chicago & Northwestern Railroad Culverts (SH00-044, SH00-047, SH00-052, and SH00-053)

During the reconnaissance survey, we found 44 Sheridan County properties to be potentially eligible for the NRHP. The properties retain good integrity and possess characteristics that may allow them to be listed on the NRHP. However, we recommend further research before a final decision on eligibility is made.

Recommendations

We identified four additional properties related to the intensive survey themes of the Spade Ranch and Mari Sandoz that are potentially eligible for the NRHP.

- Richards/Bixby House in Ellsworth (SH04-001)
- Jules Sandoz Kinkaid Claim and Orchard in the Sand Hills (SH00-028)
- Sandoz Niobrara River Homestead (SH00-137)
- Spade Store in Ellsworth (SH04-002)

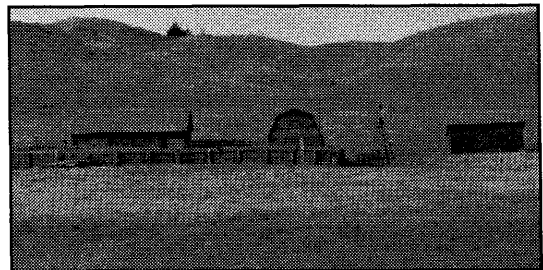


Spade Store in Ellsworth (SH04-002) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

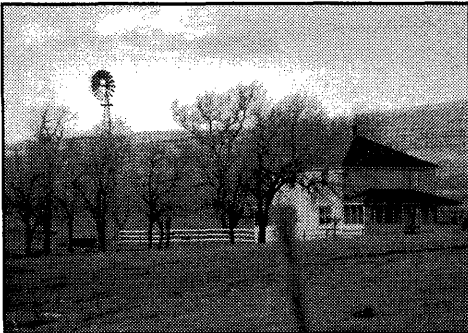
Potentially eligible properties in Sheridan County are listed below under the appropriate historic context and illustrated within the report, as indicated.

Agriculture

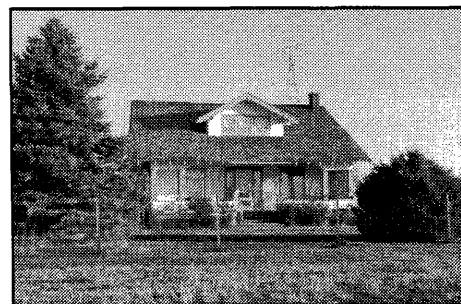
- Farmstead (SH00-057)
- Mirage Flats Irrigation District Headquarters (SH00-065) - page 23
- Farmstead (SH00-066) - page 51
- Farmstead (SH00-075) - page 24
- Farmstead (SH00-092) - page 43
- Farmstead (SH00-113)
- Ranch (SH00-124)
- Jacobson Farmstead (SH00-133) - page 52



Ranch (SH00-124) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



Farmstead (SH00-113) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



Farmstead (SH00-057) - potentially eligible for the NRHP

Recommendations

We identified four additional properties related to the intensive survey themes of the Spade Ranch and Mari Sandoz that are potentially eligible for the NRHP.

- Richards/Bixby House in Ellsworth (SH04-001)
- Jules Sandoz Kinkaid Claim and Orchard in the Sand Hills (SH00-028)
- Sandoz Niobrara River Homestead (SH00-137)
- Spade Store in Ellsworth (SH04-002)

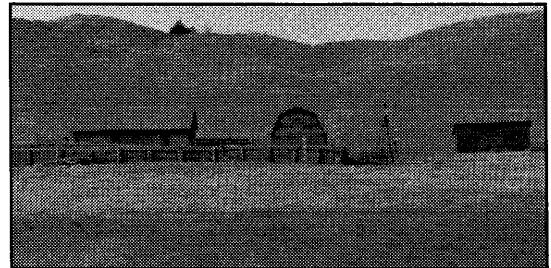


Spade Store in Ellsworth (SH04-002) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Potentially eligible properties in Sheridan County are listed below under the appropriate historic context and illustrated within the report, as indicated.

Agriculture

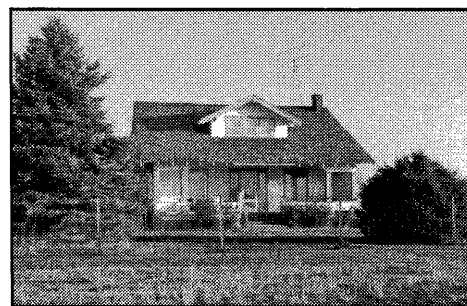
- Farmstead (SH00-057)
- Mirage Flats Irrigation District Headquarters (SH00-065) - page 23
- Farmstead (SH00-066) - page 51
- Farmstead (SH00-075) - page 24
- Farmstead (SH00-092) - page 43
- Farmstead (SH00-113)
- Ranch (SH00-124)
- Jacobson Farmstead (SH00-133) - page 52



Ranch (SH00-124) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



Farmstead (SH00-113) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



Farmstead (SH00-057) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

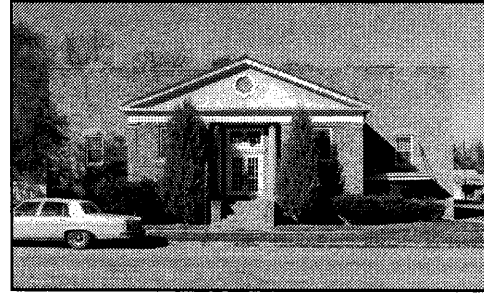
Recommendations

Association

- IOOF Hall in Gordon (SH05-020)
- Masonic Temple in Gordon (SH05-032)
- Modisett Club in Rushville (SH08-032) - page 47



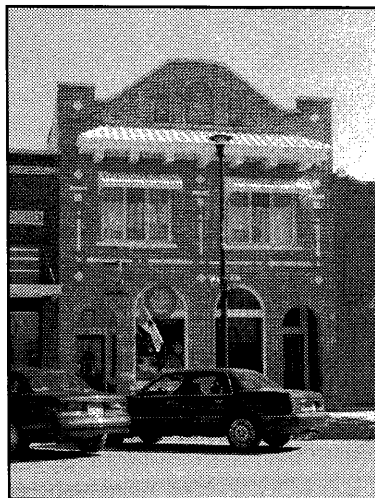
IOOF Hall in Gordon (SH05-020) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



Masonic Temple in Gordon (SH05-032) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Commerce

- Dr. Edward Dwyer Building in Gordon (SH05-018)
- Pine Ridge Agency Warehouse in Rushville (SH08-033) - page 16

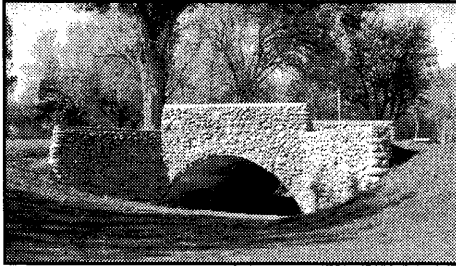


Dr. Edward Dwyer Building in Gordon (SH05-018) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

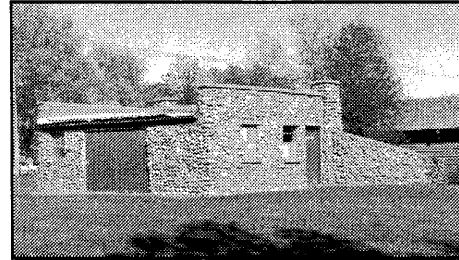
Recommendations

Diversion²²⁵

- Walgren Lake State Recreation Area Shelter and Entrance Gate (SH00-093)
- Winship Park Bridge and Restroom in Gordon (SH05-028 and SH05-029)



Winship Park Bridge in Gordon (SH05-028) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



Winship Park Restroom in Gordon (SH05-029) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



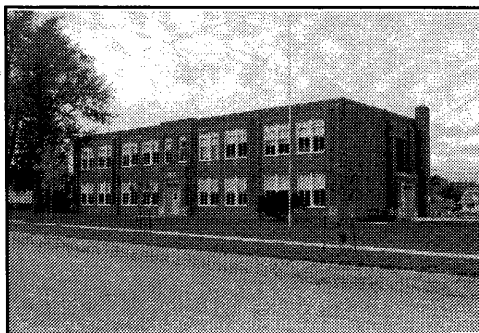
Walgren Lake State Recreation Area (SH00-093) - potentially eligible for the NRHP

Education

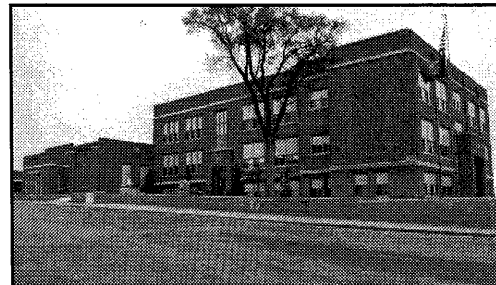
- Banner School (SH00-059)
- Ellsworth School (SH04-003) - page 48
- Hay Springs High School (SH06-024)
- Lakeside High School (SH07-002) - page 48
- Rushville Elementary School (SH08-025)



Banner School District No. 35 (SH00-059) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



Rushville Elementary School (SH08-025) - potentially eligible for the NRHP



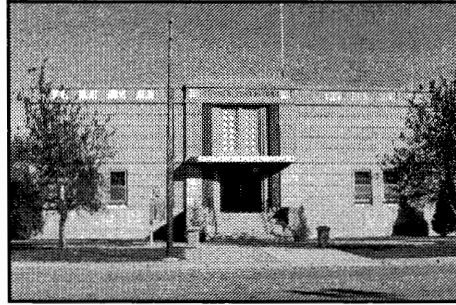
Hay Springs High School (SH06-024) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

²²⁵There is no documentation of a designed landscape at either Walgren Lake State Recreation Area or Winship Park and only the buildings and structures are recommended for the NRHP.

Recommendations

Government

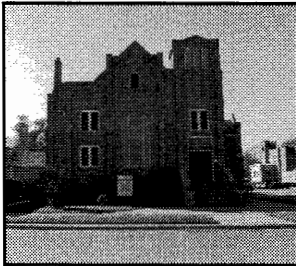
- Gordon Community Building (SH05-034)



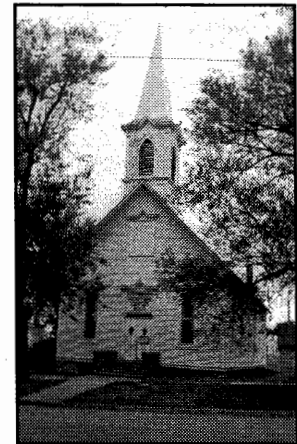
Gordon Community Building (SH05-034) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Religion

- First Presbyterian Church in Gordon (SH05-031)
- Methodist Episcopal Church in Hay Springs (SH06-007)
- Zion Lutheran Church in Hay Springs (SH06-013) - page 38
- St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Rushville (SH08-028)²²⁶ - page 49



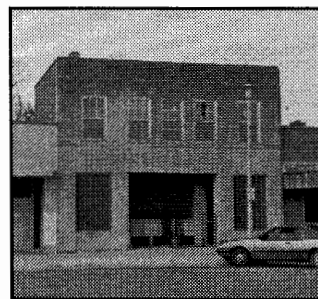
First Presbyterian Church in Gordon (SH05-031) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



Methodist Episcopal Church in Hay Springs (SH06-007) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Services

- M. Rosa Corder Restroom in Rushville (SH08-005)



M. Rosa Corder Restroom in Rushville (SH08-005) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

²²⁶ This property, constructed in 1954, will be potentially eligible when it is 50 years old in 2004.

Recommendations

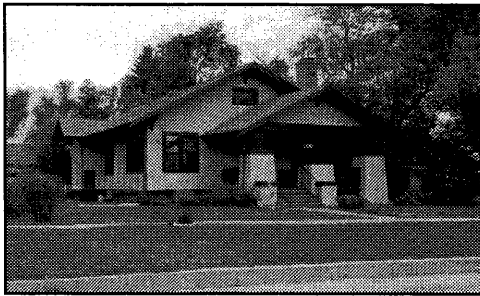
Settlement and Architecture

Urban Properties

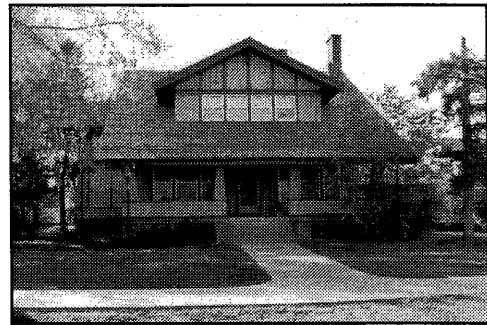
- House in Gordon (SH05-003)
- H.G. Lyon House/Old Hospital in Gordon (SH05-008) - page 51
- House in Gordon (SH05-011) - page 50
- House in Gordon (SH05-035)
- Dan Hill Residence in Gordon (SH05-037)
- House in Gordon (SH05-039) - page 52
- House in Hay Springs (SH06-004)
- House in Rushville (SH08-020)
- House in Rushville (SH08-031) - page 40



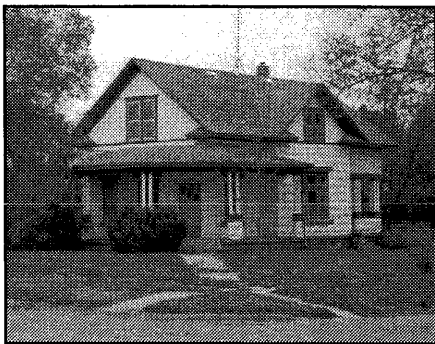
*House in Gordon (SH05-035) –
potentially eligible for the NRHP*



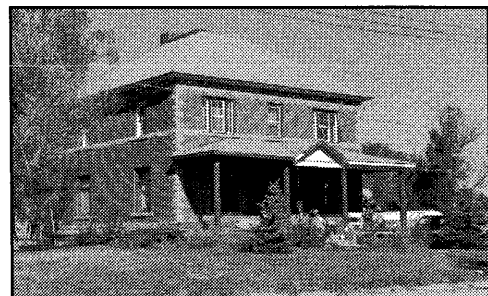
*House in Rushville (SH08-020) – potentially
eligible for the NRHP*



*Dan Hill Residence in Gordon (SH05-037) –
potentially eligible for the NRHP*



*House in Hay Springs (SH06-004) –
potentially eligible for the NRHP*

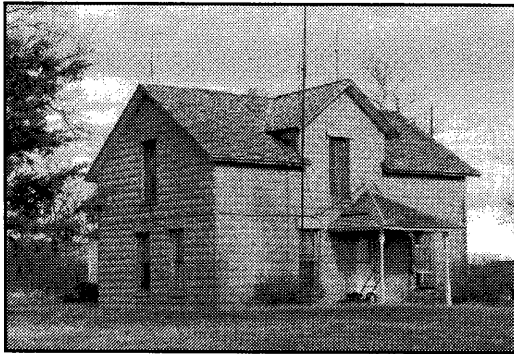


*House in Gordon (SH05-003) – potentially eligible
for the NRHP*

Recommendations

Rural Properties

- De Wolf Homestead/Kinkaid Shack (SH00-083) - page 28
- J.T. Burton House (SH00-085)
- Shepardson Sod House (SH00-099) - page 50
- Forney Log House (SH00-101)



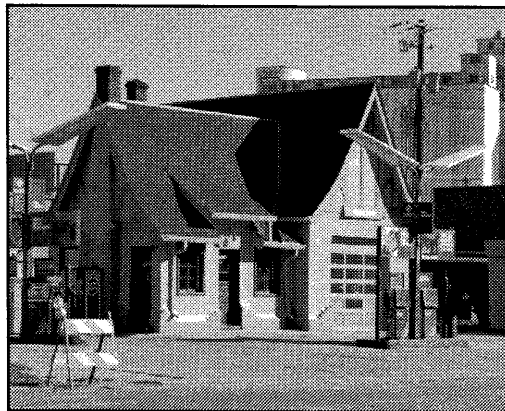
J.T. Burton House (SH00-085) – potentially eligible for the NRHP



Forney Log House (SH00-101) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Transportation

- Gas Station in Gordon (SH05-030)



Conoco Gas Station in Gordon (SH05-030) – potentially eligible for the NRHP

Recommendations

Oral Histories

Several topics in Sheridan County would make interesting oral history projects, which can uncover information about daily life and happenings not often recorded in general county histories. We recommend that oral histories be completed to capture the unique information that will eventually be lost if not recorded.

Topics for oral history projects may include discussions of:

- The evolution of ranching practices
- Agricultural practices
- Effect of the Mirage Flats Irrigation Project
- History of the Sandoz Family
- History of the Spade Ranch and the Richards and Bixby Families

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Collection of the Sheridan County Historical Society, Rushville, Nebr.

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Glossary of Architectural Terms

Glossary of Architectural Terms

American Foursquare Style (circa 1900-1930). Popularized by mail-order catalogues and speculative builders in the early twentieth century, this style is typified by its box-like massing, two-stories, hipped roof, wide overhanging eaves, central dormers, and one-story porch spanning the front facade.

Art Moderne Style (circa 1930-1950). An architectural style featuring industrial technology and streamlined simplicity. Features include smooth, rounded corners, horizontal massing, details in concrete, glass block, aluminum, and stainless steel.

Association. Link of a historic property with a historic event, activity, or person. Also, the quality of integrity through which a historic property is linked to a particular past time and place.

Balloon frame. A type of support for wood-frame buildings that utilizes vertical studs which extend the full height of the wall and floor joists fastened to the studs with nails. Balloon-frame buildings in Nebraska became popular with the expansion of the railroad when milled lumber could be shipped to the Plains for relatively low cost.

Bay window. A decorative window that projects out from the flat surface of an exterior wall, often two- or three-sided in design. Bay windows are often seen on Queen Anne style buildings.

Boom-Town (circa 1850-1880). *See false-front.*

Brackets. Support members used under overhanging eaves of a roof, usually decorative in nature.

Building. A building is erected to house activities performed by people.

Bungalow/Craftsman Style (circa 1890-1940). An architectural style characterized by overhanging eaves, modest size, open porches with large piers and low-pitched roofs.

Circa. At, in, or of approximately, used especially with dates.

Clapboard. Relatively long, thin boards that have a thick lower edge and a feathered, or tapered upper edge. The shape of the boards permits them to be overlapped horizontally. Clapboard is most commonly used as cladding material on vernacular form houses and their secondary buildings.

Column. A circular or square vertical support member.

Commercial Vernacular Style (circa 1860-1930). A form of building used to describe simply designed commercial buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which usually display large retail windows and recessed entrances on the first floor.

Glossary of Architectural Terms

Contributing (NRHP definition). A building, site, structure, or object that adds to the historic associations, historic architectural qualities for which a property is significant. The resource was present during the period of significance, relates to the documented significance of the property, and possesses historic integrity, or is capable of yielding important information about the period.

Contributing (NeHBS definition). A building, site, structure, object, or collection of buildings such as a farmstead, which meets the NeHBS criteria of integrity, historic association, historic architectural qualities, and was present during the period of significance. *A property that contributes to the NeHBS is generally evaluated with less strictness than for an individual listing on the NRHP, yet more strictness than a building which may "contribute" to a proposed NRHP district.*

Cross-Gable (c. 1860-1910). A vernacular building form typically two stories and square in plan with two identical roofs whose ridges intersect to produce a cruciform.

Design. Quality of integrity applying to the elements that create the physical form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.

Dormers. A vertical window projecting from the roof. Variations of dormer types can be based on the dormer's roof form, for example shed dormer, gable dormers, and hipped dormers.

Dutch Colonial Revival Style (circa 1900-1940). A residential architectural style based on the more formal Georgian Revival style. This style is identified by its gambrel roof and symmetrical facade.

Eclectic Style (circa 1890-1910). An eclectic building displays a combination of architectural elements from various styles. It commonly resulted when a house designed in one architectural style was remodeled into another.

Elevation. Any single side of a building or structure.

Eligible. Properties that meet the National Park Service Criteria for nomination and listing on the NRHP.

Evaluation. Process by which the significance and integrity of a historic property are judged and eligibility for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listing is determined.

Extant. Still standing or existing (as in a building, structure, site, and/or object).

Glossary of Architectural Terms

False-front (circa 1850-1880). A vernacular building form, which is typically a one-and-one-half story front gable frame building with a square facade that extends vertically in front of the front-facing gable. This gives an entering visitor the sense of approaching a larger building. This form is often used in the construction of a first-generation commercial building, thus is also known as “boom-town.”

Feeling. Quality of integrity through which a historic property evokes the aesthetic or historic sense of past time and place.

Front Gable (circa 1860-1910). The vernacular form of a building, generally a house, in which the triangular end of the roof faces the street.

Gable. The vertical triangular end of a building from cornice or eaves to ridge.

Gabled Ell (circa 1860-1910). The vernacular form of a building, generally a house, in which two gabled wings are perpendicular to one another in order to form an “L”-shaped plan.

Gable end. The triangular end of an exterior wall.

Gable roof. A roof type formed by the meeting of two sloping roof surfaces.

Gambrel roof. A roof type with two slopes on each side.

Hipped roof. A roof type formed by the meeting of four sloping roof surfaces.

Historic context. The concept used to group related historic properties based upon a theme, a chronological period, and/or a geographic area.

Integrity. Authenticity of a property’s historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property’s historic period. (See *Survey of Sheridan County, Research Design*.)

Italianate Style (circa 1870-1890). A popular style for houses, these square, rectangular, or L-shaped, two-story buildings have low-pitched, hip roofs, with wide eaves usually supported by heavy brackets, tall narrow windows, and front porches. In some cases, the roof may be topped with a cupola.

Keystone. A wedge-shaped piece at the crown of an arch that locks the other pieces in place. It is seen most often over arched doors and window openings and is sometimes of a different material than the arch material itself.

Glossary of Architectural Terms

Late Gothic Revival Style (circa 1880-1920). A later version of the Gothic style, these buildings are generally larger and use heavy masonry construction. In churches, masonry is sometimes used throughout the structure. The pointed-arch window openings remain a key feature; however, designs are more subdued than those of the earlier period.

Location. Quality of integrity retained by a historic property existing in the same place as it did during the period of significance.

Materials. Quality of integrity applying to the physical elements that were combined or deposited in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.

National Register of Historic Places. The official federal list of districts, buildings, sites, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture that are important in the prehistory or history of their community, state, or nation. The program is administered through the National Park Service by way of State Historic Preservation Offices (see *Introduction* of this report).

National Register of Historic Places Criteria. Established criteria for evaluating the eligibility of properties for inclusion in the NRHP. See discussion in *Survey of Sheridan County, Research Design*.

Neo-Classical Style (circa 1900-1920). An architectural style characterized by a symmetrical facade and usually includes a pediment portico with classical columns.

Noncontributing (NRHP definition). A building, site, structure, or object that does not add to the historic architectural qualities or historic associations for which a property is significant. The resource was not present during the period of significance; does not relate to the documented significance of the property; or due to alterations, disturbances, additions, or other changes, it no longer possesses historic integrity nor is capable of yielding important information about the period.

Noncontributing (NeHBS definition). A building, site, structure, object, or collection of buildings such as a farmstead, which does not meet the NeHBS criteria of integrity, historic association, historic architectural qualities, or was not present during the period of significance. Noncontributing properties are not generally entered into, nor kept in, the NeHBS inventory, however, exceptions do exist.

Object. An artistic, simple, and/or small-scale construction not identified as a building or structure.

One-story Cube (circa 1870-1930). The vernacular form a house, which is one-story and box-like in massing. Features generally include a low-hipped roof, a full front porch recessed under the roof, little ornamentation, and simple cladding, such as clapboard, brick, or stucco.

Glossary of Architectural Terms

Overhead truss bridge. An overhead or through truss bridge carries its traffic load level with its bottom cords. Lateral bracing connects the two sides of the truss, forming a canopy overhead.

Period of Significance. Span of time in which a property attained the significance for which it meets the NRHP criteria.

Pony truss bridge (circa 1880-1920). A low iron or steel truss, approximately five to seven feet in height, located alongside and above the roadway surface. Pony truss bridges often range in span lengths of 20 to 100 feet.

Potentially eligible. Properties that may be eligible for listing on the NRHP pending further research and investigation.

Pratt overhead truss bridge. A type of overhead truss patented by Thomas and Caleb Pratt in 1844. This bridge type utilizes diagonal members in tension with vertical members to create compression, thus holding the bridge together.

Property. A building, site, structure, and/or object situated within a delineated boundary.

Property type. A classification for a building, structure, site, or object based on its historic use or function.

Queen Anne Style (circa 1880-1900). A style that enjoyed widespread popularity, particularly in the eastern portion of Nebraska. These houses are typically two stories tall, have asymmetrical facades, and steeply pitched rooflines of irregular shape. Characteristics include a variety of surface textures on walls, prominent towers, tall chimneys, and porches with gingerbread trim.

Rustic Style (c. 1930-1940). A vernacular building form often associated with the Works Progress Administration or Civilian Conservation Corps projects of the Great Depression. This style is identified by rough hewn logs, fieldstone, or rusticated stone exterior building materials and is most often found in park or rural settings.

Setting. Quality of integrity applying to the physical environment of a historic property.

Shed roof. A roof consisting of one inclined plane.

Shelterbelt. A natural or planned barrier of trees or shrubs planted to reduce erosion and provide shelter from wind and storm activity.

Side Gable (circa 1860-1940). The vernacular form of a building, generally a house, in which the gable end of the roof is perpendicular to the street.

Glossary of Architectural Terms

Significance. Importance of a historic property as defined by the NRHP criteria in one or more areas of significance.

Site. The location of a prehistoric or historic event.

Spanish Colonial Revival Style (circa 1900-1920). These buildings, which have a southwestern flavor, show masonry construction usually covered with plaster or stucco, red clay tiled hipped roofs, and arcaded porches. Some facades are enriched with curvilinear and decorated roof lines.

Structure. Practical constructions not used to shelter human activities.

Stucco. A material usually made of Portland cement, sand, and a small percentage of lime and applied in a plastic state to form a hard covering for exterior walls.

Tudor Revival Style (circa 1920-1940). A style that reflects a blend of a variety of elements from late English medieval styles. It is identified by steep gables, half-timbering, and mixes of stone, stucco, and wood.

Turret. A little tower that is an ornamental structure and projects at an angle from a larger structure.

Two-story Cube (circa 1860-1890). The vernacular form, generally for a house, which is a two-story building, box-like in massing, with a hipped roof, near absence of surface ornament, and simple exterior cladding such as brick, clapboard, or stucco.

Vernacular. A functional, simplistic building or structure without stylistic details. Vernacular form buildings were usually designed by the builder, not by an architect.

Workmanship. Quality of integrity applying to the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture, people, or artisan.

Sheridan County Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey

Prepared for:

***Nebraska State Historical Society
State Historic Preservation Office***

Prepared by:



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Historic photographs on the front cover from top to bottom: Ellsworth School (SH04-003); Mari Sandoz (courtesy of NSHS); Spade Ranch Barn (SH00-030); House in Rushville (SH08-020); Zion Lutheran Church in Hay Springs (SH06-013); William Comstock (courtesy of SG); and Farmstead (SH00-113). Historic photographs on the rear cover from top right to bottom: Pine Creek Ranch Barn (SH00-120); Farmstead (SH00-057); House in Gordon (SH05-035); M. Rosa Corder Restroom in Rushville (SH08-005); Spade Cookhouse (SH00-030) courtesy of SG; cattle on Modisett Ranch (courtesy of the SCHS); and House in Hay Springs (SH06-004).

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